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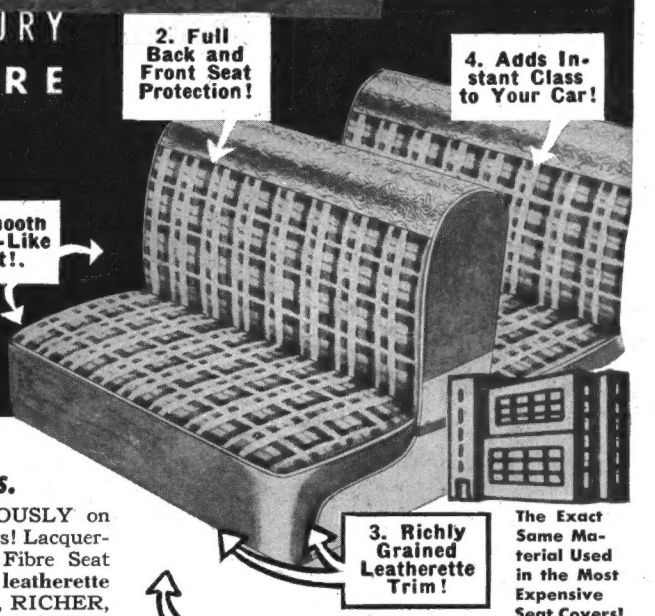
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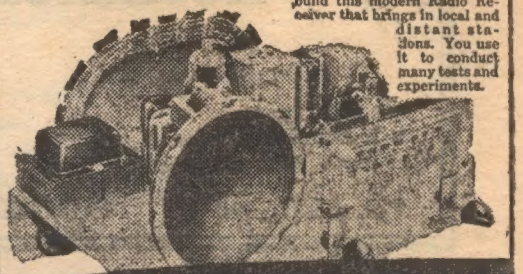

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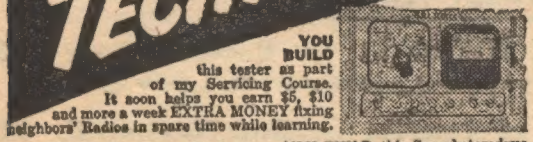

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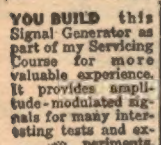

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The Ballad of Hard-Luck Henry

By ROBERT SERVICE

Now wouldn't you expect to find a man an awful crank
That's staked out nigh three hundred claims, and every one a blank;
That's followed every fool stampede, and seen the rise and fall
Of camps where men got gold in chunks and he got none at all;
That's prospected a bit of ground and sold it for a song
To see it yield a fortune to some fool that came along;
That's sunk a dozen bed-rock holes, and not a speck in sight,
Yet sees them take a million from the claims to left and right?
Now aren't things like that enough to drive a man to booze?
But Hard-Luck Smith was hoodoo-proof—he knew the way to lose.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen four—leap-year I've heard them say—
When Hard-Luck came to Hunker Creek and took a hillside lay.
And lo! as if to make amends for all the futile past,
Late in the year he struck it rich, and the real pay-streak at last.
The riffles of his sluicing-box were choked with speckled earth,
And night and day he worked that lay for all that he was worth.
And when in chill December's gloom his lucky lease expired,
He found that he had made a stake as big as he desired.

One day while meditating on the waywardness of fate,
He felt the ache of lonely man to find a fitting mate;
A petticoated pard to cheer his solitary life,
A woman with soft, soothing ways, a confident, a wife,
And while he cooked his supper on his little Yukon stove,
He wished that he had staked a claim in Love's rich treasure-trove:
When suddenly he paused and held aloft a Yukon egg,
For there in pencilled letters was the magic name of Peg.

You know these Yukon eggs of ours—some pink, some green, some blue—
A dollar per, assorted tints, assorted flavors too.
The supercilious cheechako might designate them high,
But one acquires a taste for them and likes them by-and-by.

Well, Hard-Luck Henry took this egg and held it to the light,
And there was more faint pencilling that sorely taxed his sight.
At last he made it out, and then the legend ran like this—
"Will Klondike miner write to Peg, Plumhollow, Squashville, Wis.?"

That night he got to thinking of this far-off, unknown fair;
It seemed so sort of opportune, an answer to his prayer.
She flitted sweetly through his dreams, she haunted him by day,
She smiled through clouds of nicotine, she cheered his weary way.
At last he yielded to the spell, his course of love he set—
Wisconsin his objective point; his object, Margaret.

With every mile of sea and land his longing grew and grew.
He practiced all his pretty words, and these, I fear, were few.
At last, one frosty evening, with a cold chill down his spine,
He found himself before her house, the threshold of the shrine.
His courage flickered to a spark, then glowed with sudden flame—
He knocked; he heard a welcome word; she came—his goddess came.
Oh, she was fair as any flower, and huskily he spoke:
"I'm all the way from Klondike, with a mighty heavy poke.
I'm looking for a lassie, one whose Christian name is Peg,
Who sought a Klondike miner, and who wrote it on an egg."

The lassie gazed at him a space, her cheeks grew rosy red;
She gazed at him with tear-bright eyes, then tenderly she said:
"Yes, lonely Klondike miner, it is true my name is Peg.
My heart went out to someone in that land of night and cold;
But oh, I fear that Yukon egg must have been mighty old.
I waited long, I hoped and feared; you should have come before;
I've been a wedded woman now for eighteen months or more
I'm sorry, since you've come so far, you ain't the one that wins;
But won't you take a step inside—I'll let you see the twins."

The knife quivered like an arrow in Quill's shooting hand.

THE HE-WOLF'S WHELP

By ROBERT R. RICHARDS

Hickory was the fanged-mouth whelp of a murdered lobo sire, and he stalked his blood revenge on a strange pair—themselves as crafty as the stalker.

THE HORIZON was bleak. A few willow clumps being whipped by the Arctic wind. The snow was endless. A sea of white waves frozen in a wintry grip. There were trees away from the horizon. They bordered Mendo Creek like lonely sentinels. They ended before a cabin which stood on relatively high ground.

William Mendoza Daley had the look of a man who has spent his life in cold climes. A dry face with a web of weather-beaten lines. The skin was like cool wax tightly drawn over prominent cheekbones. His hair, bright grey, like the fur of a fox. His movements lean and springy. Strangely young for a man in his fifties. But what lived in Bill Daley lived in his eyes. Grey as stones, buried deep in his head, fierce and sad.

William Mendoza Daley cupped his left hand over his forehead. His right hand and arm was nothing more than a paralyzed twig. He'd been a good shot with

his right hand. Since the fight he'd found it easier to handle a knife instead of a gun. Jed Quill's bullet had shattered the nerves of Daley's right arm five years ago. And his hatred for Quill had never died for five minutes since then. Losing money was one thing but when a man loses his wife, his reputation and his best pal, he can't forget. He told himself that Lola wasn't worth thinking about. There were other things that burned deeper. He hadn't ever found another partner like Carl Larson. His present partner was the closest to it. But he was only a kid.

Bill's grey eyes scanned the horizon. No sign of his partner. Only one approach to Mendo Creek and Jack wasn't on it. He had sent Jack to Council for the pump. Daley didn't want to come into the range of the law or Quill. Jed Quill wasn't liked by his fellow townsmen but he was the strongest power in Council. The showdown would come some day. Daley swore on that. If he tangled with Quill again he'd make sure it wasn't in Council.

He wondered why Jack hadn't returned. It shouldn't have taken him more than a week both ways. The trails were packed hard as asphalt. The weather crisp and clear. And nearly a month had passed. Daley tried to explain the delay. Jack Hickory was a chechako. He didn't know the trails. No, there wasn't any use trying to excuse him. Even a chechako couldn't be that green.

Quill and Lola were in Council. Quill had a velvet tongue and plenty of dough. The kid could be talked into anything. Jack Hickory wasn't as open and above board as he had thought at first meeting. In a pinch Jed Quill could use Lola as bait. No trick was too low or dirty for Quill's hands. The rumors of gold on Mendo Creek must have come to Quill's ears, Daley thought. News of gold seemed to travel in some mysterious way from the remotest regions.

BILL DALEY stepped inside the ramshackle cabin. It was small; crowded with empty oil cans, boxes, twigs and a pair of bunks. It smelled strongly of tobacco, whiskey, leather and the sweat of men. The kid's end of the cabin was a heap of disorder. The older man felt like wringing his neck every time he looked at it.

There was one thing he could say for the kid though. He knew how to make up his bunk. The blankets were tucked and folded as neatly as an army bed. He wondered where the kid had learned that. When he took Jack in last month he didn't ask any questions. It was the way of the north. You took a sourdough on his face value until proven otherwise. Besides, the kid had the same honest look of Carl Larson, his dead partner.

Bill slipped into his parka. He thrust a big hunting knife into his belt. There was no use waiting any longer. He'd have to head for Council and see for himself. If the kid had gone over with Quill at least he'd know where he stood. Daley shoved hardtack, bacon, beans and tea into a frayed canvas bag. His eyes fell upon a bulging sack. Bill dipped his hands into the contents. "Dog-rice," he muttered. "The kid didn't take an ounce of it for the huskies."

He emptied a carton of fresh rice. There were only a few grains left. That dumbell of a chechako! That's what comes from taking a guy in without knowing about him. Bill glanced at a blank space on the wall. Jack Hickory had taken their only gun. Daley had sold his Colt for a last payment on the pump. Serves me right for not goin' to Council for the pump myself.

Daley left the door ajar. It was a funny thing about this region. It was the locked cabins that got busted into. Strangers figured you were hiding something valuable inside if the door was bolted. He stood upon a high point of land. The wind bit his drawn cheeks. His eyes surveyed Mendo Creek with pride. He had discovered the frozen stream himself and called it after his middle name, Mendoza.

A rich vein of gold-flecked ore slept coldly beneath the earth. He had seen it for himself right after the freeze-up. He had burned through the frozen ground and tapped it. A yellow treasure just a hundred yards from his cabin. Wouldn't Quill like to get his greasy fingers on it. Daley

knew what he was going to do with it. Every ounce that Bill took from the earth would be used to break Quill. He felt his crippled arm. The debt would be paid some day.

In a few weeks, or maybe even days, spring would burst wildly through the ice-locked north and warm the land for mining. And the pump . . . it had cost their last dollar and the gun to boot. But it could do the work of a dozen sourdoughs.

Bill stopped once before the trail turned. It was the last point from which he could view the creek. He hadn't been away from it since the freeze-up. Now it was May. In all that time he had seen only one other person besides Jack. An Eskimo hunter who was too old to have any curiosity. "White man go strange places," he commented without asking any questions as to why they had pitched camp in so desolate a region.

Once on the trail his thoughts returned to his partner. Jack Hickory had struck his fancy at their first meeting. He had been searching for a partner with bull strength who was easy on the bottle and hard when it came to work. The kid was plenty anxious besides being awful hungry. He had talked a blue streak about taking a crack at mining.

And yet the kid had come to Alaska without a red cent and nothing but a Winchester. Bill hadn't seen a chechako yet who didn't carry a pan and shovel in his pack. It was the plunderers that traveled with nothing but rifles.

Bill's heavy mukluks pounded the snow. He walked with a brisk, unchanging pace. He knew all the short cuts and made good time. Tonight he could lay over at that abandoned cabin near Red Fox. Tomorrow he would be in Council unless he met the kid on the trail.

He tried to think of other things but his thoughts kept returning to Jack. High strung himself, the kid's raw youth and laughter had a soothing effect upon him. But he had seen Jack's face grow grim when he thought Daley wasn't looking. Hickory brightened up the place all right. Nerveless as a bear and just as dumb. Or was he? Maybe William Mendoza Daley was the dumb one for taking in a stranger? Maybe the pump was in Quill's hands by now.

Nothing seemed to matter much to the kid as long as he was paid and fed. Jack was just as likely to string along with the guy who gave him the most dough and chow as not. He was a coin with a smile on one side. The other side Bill could only guess at.

It was noon. The sun warm and high in the sky. It was a spring sun alright but the earth was still bound by winter. Daley pitched a temporary camp near a clump of pine. He broke willow branches with his one good arm by pinning them beneath his mukluks. They burst into sudden flame after he sprayed them with coal oil and set a match to it.

A sharp and rasping cry brought his glance skyward. A stream of birds streaked across the face of the sun. His grey eyes brightened. Cranes. Little brown cranes. They came right before the spring break-up. Damnit, if the pump were only already at the creek. It was gonna be one helluva job lugging it up from Council through the break-up. To say nothing of risking their necks. That young galoot could sure mess things up.

AFTER hours on the trail Daley lost track of time. The days were long. Night never came when it should have. The shadows of the trees lengthened like long black ribbons. The sky was a medley of brilliant color in the west. Then a strand of yellow, like a single hair, was all that was left of the sunset. But the sky was still strangely light. A raw dampness came from the earth. Bill frowned. The break-up was closer than he had realized.

Daley knew he was nearing the deserted cabin. It was half-hidden in a thicket above a caribou crossing. He thought of that night five years back. Larson and himself had surprised Quill and Lola at the Indian's cabin. His partner had stopped a bullet that was meant for him. But the second shot had ripped into his arm. The arrogant Quill had taken both of them for dead when he saw their forms stretched in the snow. So had the

Indian who ran the place as a stop-over.

The Indian decided to return to his tribesmen to tell them of the murders. He never completed his trip. The next morning the redskin was found dead. Quill had silenced the last loose tongue of evidence. Daley returned to the spot after his arm healed enough for him to move without pain. There was nothing left of Larson. Nothing but an empty cartridge shell which had dropped from the peculiarly painted white rifle which his partner always carried.

Bill picked his way slowly down a decline. He saw a frozen stream glistening like the scales of a snake. It was the caribou crossing. He heard the drip of water beneath the ice. It kept count with his steps.

Then he saw hundreds of prints stenciled in the snow. They were dog prints. That's strange, he thought, a team of dogs and no marks of sled runners?

A TRAIL of blood along the bank arrested his eyes. He followed it and the mutilated carcass of a caribou greeted him. Its chalky bones stretched like fingers through the skin. It was sunken in a splotch of blood. He didn't have to think twice now. Wolves.

Instantly he thought of his partner. Maybe the wolves had gotten to him before Quill did. He got a vision of Hickory's big frame lying stripped and torn in the thickets with the pump resting by his side in the blood-stained snow.

He heard a noise. Bill crouched and listened. A howl wailed towards the sky. An icicle of fear pierced his heart. To be caught in the open by those monsters! At least if he could get to the vantage point of the cabin. He told himself to keep calm and alert. He waited. There were no more howls. The wind was blowing in the opposite direction from where the ghostly howl seemed to come. That was good. It would be harder for them to pick up his scent.

Still he took no chances. He crawled across the icy stream. The less visible he made himself the better. He edged up the bank on all fours. He saw the corner of the cabin projecting through the trees. He fumbled along the end logs and felt the door. It gave easily beneath his nervous fingers. The crunch of something beneath his mukluks startled him. Willow roots. The superstitious Indians had placed them there to keep the evil spirits from chasing their murdered tribesman.

Bills' grey eyes searched the dark interior of the cabin. He groped for the wall. Suddenly he was aware of something breathing a few yards away from him. A pair of yellow eyes glared through the blackness.

His body stiffened with fear despite himself. He stood hypnotized. Afraid to run. Afraid to attack.

The pair of glassy yellow eyes multiplied into a dozen more. Low growls filled the cabin. He heard the rumble in their throats. The lick of wet tongues against white fangs. He withdrew the knife silently from his belt. His heart beat fast. It turned his body cold and sickly weak. A man could never feel the same again when he had one hand to fight with.

Knife uplifted. Daley moved quietly back. If he ran they'd pounce him in a body. Show no fear. The can of coal oil in his pack. He could pour it over the exit. Strike a match. Keep them away with a wall of fire.

They scrambled to their paws and snarled. He ripped at his pack with the blade. The yellow eyes flashed through the dark. His forearm shot up to block his face and throat. The impact of the springing body sent him staggering into the snow. He whirled to his feet. The yellow eyes and the wet teeth were on top of him again.

He struck swiftly with the knife and clipped the tip of the beast's ear. Then his arm shot back again and he burrowed his elbow into the brute's throat. He had done this once with a mad dog. Choked the animal to death with his arm. The beast was erect and snarling on its hind legs. Man and animal danced weirdly in the snow.

The others formed a ring and waited. They couldn't lose. Instinct told them food wasn't far off, be it one of their own or another. The two figures swayed in the moonlight. Man and beast were

locked in a death grip.

Daley's mouth twisted as the fangs bit through his parka. His knife was useless in the arm that was holding the brute off. He moved his head forward and clamped the handle in his own teeth like a vise. Holding the handle firmly in the grip of his jaws he inched the blade into the shaggy neck of the wolf.

The brute's mouth had been forced wider than it could spread. The skin tore and bled at the corners. The terrible power of the beast's jawbones lessened by the second. The new wound in the neck drew blood and strength from the shaggy monster.

Daley raised his knee and kicked at the silvery chest. The brute fell back and its head snapped to the side. The wolf lay broken and panting its life out in the snow.

The others leaped upon the dying animal with furious snarls. The handle of the knife jutted from the twisted neck. An attempt to recover the blade was too dangerous. In the flush of battle he had lost his fear. But now it had come back again. He felt stripped, one handed and weaponless. He raced for the back of the cabin. Daley pulled himself up to the slippery roof by clutching the end bows with his claw-like left hand. Then he moved over the cross beams and watched them devour the fallen beast.

The cross beams were loose on the roof. He could pull one out and drop it on them. But he couldn't kill all of them with a single beam. And those who escaped would come after him. His grey eyes flashed. He tore loose the paper he packed his food in. He drenched it with coal oil. Then he took the remainder of the can and splashed it on the gnawing brutes. Their oiled backs glistened in the moonlight.

He set the soaked paper on fire and dropped it. He prayed as it floated to the ground. The yellow eyes turned. The animals drew back from the flaming paper. None of the flames touched their oiled backs. The paper burned out in the snow. The beasts went snarling and fighting back to their meal. Each brute fought for choice meat.

Daley kneeled on the cross beams. He had done a foolish thing. His oil was gone and now they had seen where he was hiding. They said that wolves were afraid once you fought them off. But that kind of thinking was all right for a man with two hands.

If they tried to climb the roof he wondered if he could kick them off without getting his feet chewed to stumps.

He moved over the slippery cross beams. It was hard, holding with one hand in the darkness. His fingers reached out for the next beam and he lurched forward.

There was nothing but space beneath him and he was falling through. He felt the crude planking of the floor crash against his knees and push into his groin. Everything went black before he could feel pain.

BILL DALEY opened his eyes slowly. The cabin was a mass of shadows flickering from the light of a small lamp. He rested weakly on his elbow and saw the ruddy face of his partner.

"Sure had to haul fast to get you, pard," Jack said.

Suddenly Bill remembered the pump. "So the wolves didn't get you after all."

"Nope, but they almost got you," Jack replied.

"Where's the pump?" Bill asked suspiciously.

Jack jerked his head, "On the trail. I dropped everythin' when I heard the wolves howlin' their gizzards out. Took the Winnie along and figured on doin' them critters out of a meal. Now I'm not so sure I did right."

The two men looked hard at each other. "Seems like you got ideas about me takin' a flyer with the pump." Jack said resentfully. Bill grunted, "You been gone long enough to make Nome and back." Daley licked cigarette paper against his thin mouth, "I wanna see the pump," he said.

They made their way silently through the brush. Bill shoved the tarp aside. "That valve ain't the one that comes with the pump," he said. Jack's brow furrowed. "The new one was damaged. I had to pick up another."

"Where?"

"Council." Jack said.

"From who . . . Jed Quill?"

"Damnit," Bill flipped the cigarette angrily in the snow, "I should've told you to stay away from Quill. I don't want any dealings with him."

"Thought Quill might be a pal of yours?" The kid's eyes narrowed. Daley turned away. His face still smoldering. He covered the pump and picked up the tandem.

"So Quill knows about the mine."

Jack had been quietly studying him, "I didn't say nothin' about it."

The older man shook his head in disgust, "Does he know I'm in these parts?"

"Sure," Jack said. "I told him. Anythin' wrong with that?" Bill's lips locked with anger. The young partner hitched his belt and raised his head.

"What's your gripe against each other anyway? You know Quill wasn't too glad to hear that you're alive either." Jack added sarcastically.

They trotted alongside the sled in silence. Suddenly Bill snapped, "There's a little matter of my wife."

"Lola's a good looker," the kid said. Bill grimaced, "She's got you on the hook too, eh?"

Jack smiled. "No, I was just lookin'."

"Three weeks' worth." Bill's mouth curled.

"I had to get the part for the pump," the kid said sullenly.

Bill muttered, "A likely story." He knew there was no further use to question. The kid was holding back. Bill felt it in every word.

The trail was wet with rain. The dogs blinked uncomfortably. They kept glancing back. The partners had to urge them on. The steady drizzle obscured their vision and softened the snow. The rawness bit into their bones. The men shuddered from the dampness.

A CLUMP of trees on high ground loomed before them. "Let's pitch camp, I'm hungry," Daley said.

The wind lashed wetly at them. Jack set about driving staves for the pump tent. Bill tried to throw up a fire. Then he heard Jack struggling with the tent. He'd have to show the chechako how to set a tent against the wind.

Daley turned from the fire in time to see Jack knot the last cord tightly over the staves. The tent was firmly set up. Bill knew he couldn't have done as well himself. He figured that was two things his green partner could do. Make a bed and right a tent pretty well. Too well, in fact.

"Say Hickory," he asked suddenly, "you ever been in the army?" The kid moved his head negatively.

They sat within the tent with all the flaps closed. The wind tore at the seams. Jack stretched out and dozed off in the dark. Bill stirred restlessly. He thought of Lola and Quill. What had that skunk, Quill, plotted with the kid? Then he told himself it didn't matter. William Mendoza Daley was ready for the showdown anytime, be it four or two legged wolves.

He looked at the kid's face. It was funny how a guy could look so honest in his sleep. If he were only sure about Quill and the kid. He'd do the kid in right now.

The ropes strained. The tent billowed like a balloon in the wind. Then a series of thunderous claps shocked both partners to their feet. "The break-up," Daley said, hardly believing his own words. The howling of dogs was wiped out by the thunderous sound of ice breaking on the rivers.

"Damn, but we wouldn't have been in this mess if you'd have only come back when you were supposed to." Bill turned hostile eyes on the kid. "I told you I hadda wait for the pump," the kid said impatiently.

His voice didn't convince Bill. Cracking ice broke on both sides of them. "Pack up, we're clearin' out," Bill commanded.

"Why?" Jack asked.

"We're between two rivers, that's why."

"So what?"

Bill gathered up supplies. "You'll find out."

Jack Hickory balked but he followed. Men, dogs and sled pushed through the slushed filled valley. Water swept at them from all sides. It poured over the slushy basin a hundred feet at a time. They raced ankle deep through the rising tide.

Chunks of ice cracked at their legs and they swore.

"We're lucky," Bill said, "the real big ones are still on the rivers."

They made it to a mound of high dry land before the swirling avalanche of water reached their waists. A few yards before their startled eyes they watched the river roar with the crash of ice. Big spruce were snapped off the banks like thin sticks.

The men sat grimly on the isolated mound. Six foot thick slabs of ice hurled themselves along the watery inferno. Bill ticked off fifty-six hours on his watch before the water receded. There were no twigs or branches to build a fire with. They stuffed their mouths with raw rice and sucked at it until it could be swallowed. "Lucky thing I took the good rice by mistake," Jack chuckled. Daley nodded and grunted.

They left the mound. The sled bogged into the water-soaked land. They crowbarred it out of the mixture of snow and mud by using the tent stakes. All the trails had been washed under. They roamed an entire day without reaching familiar territory. "Do you know where you're goin'?" Jack challenged.

"Would I be leadin' if I didn't," Bill cracked back. He knew they were within a mile of Mendo Creek. Let the kid stew for awhile. Do him good. Show him who's boss.

THE WATER drained from the land and the torn earth healed. The short Alaskan spring warmed the backs of the men as they pitched into the mine. For days Bill noticed that the kid was sizing him up. Finally one night Jack began to pry. "The sourdoughs don't like you in Council," he said.

Daley sprinkled tobacco on cigarette paper. He didn't look up. "Yeah, well I don't like 'em either so that makes us even."

"But that ain't the way they look at," the kid persisted.

"Who's they?" An ugly frown creased Daley's face. "Jed Quill?"

"Jed ain't the only one," Jack said. "The others believe you did it."

"Did what?" Bill looked him in the eye.

"The killing at the cabin," the kid spoke slowly but his voice quivered. "I heard your partner was done in and the body was never found."

Billy pursed his thin lips. So he's tryin' to pump me, eh? He drew on the cigarette. What was behind all this? He turned to Jack, "Get this straight. Whatever you hear about me in Council is a lie. As a matter of fact it's none of your damn business. I don't wanna hear no more about it." Daley left the cabin abruptly. He could feel the kid's eyes on his back.

They stayed away from each other for the next few days. Hickory separated the tailings while Bill handled the pump. They were like caged animals who watched each other constantly.

Daley thought a few things over. He figured Jack knew more than he let on. He saw the kid was playing a waiting game. Just sitting it out until he could tag Bill with something. Instinct told Daley that his partner might even be one of Quill's deputies. As the law was weak in Council, Quill, being the biggest shot in town, had the power to appoint deputies.

Bill reckoned that he would have to be very careful if he didn't want to be measured for a spruce bough box. The kid seemed to read his thoughts.

"I found an old picture by the mine," Hickory shoved a glossy coated cardboard photo at Bill. "This guy with the white rifle, was that your partner?"

Daley pushed the photo aside. "I cut you in on the Mendo Creek claim, not on the private life of William Mendoza Daley. That seems hard for you to savvy." Bill picked up his pack. "I'm sleepin' outdoors. The air don't stink so much in the open." He caught the suspicion in the kid's eyes as he took the Winchester with him.

Bill looked up at the stars. It was past midnight and the sky still had milky streaks of light threading through it. He shut his eyes but there was no use. His mind was full of Lola, Quill and the kid. The earth was alive at night. Swaying trees, insects, mosquitoes and the con-

stant murmur of the creek. Bill swore. He smoked one cigarette after another and then fell into troubled sleep.

He could tell from the way the sun streaked across the sky that it was late in the morning. There was no sign of the kid. He listened. He heard the pump beating like an iron heart down at the creek. Hickory was at work.

Bill entered the cabin. His grey eyes scanned the room. He searched for the kid's pack. Then he pulled it quickly from beneath the bunk. This was one way of finding out about the kind of company the kid kept. The fingers of his one good hand searched nervously. Then it landed on something hard. It slid easily from the pack. A pistol. His mouth twisted and he muttered, "Had it along all the time, huh." He went over the other items in detail. There was one other that interested him. A khaki shaving kit with the United States Army insignia on it. Well this explained the expert bed and tent making.

He rolled the pack back quickly as he heard footsteps. The kid was standing at the door. Their eyes met. Bill could tell that Jack saw something was amiss. "Takin' the day off, huh?" the kid grunted. "I don't hear no army bugle blowin' reveille," Bill said. He saw the mention of the word army had an effect on Jack.

Bill watched him like a hawk for the next twenty-four hours. He was giving the kid plenty of time. Then he heard what he'd been waiting for. Jack was fumbling through Bill's pack now. Daley stood by the window and peeked through the torn tarp covering. He moved slyly towards the door and grabbed the Winchester.

The kid whirled around, his blue eyes startled as the muzzle of the rifle poked coldly against his chest. "Find it?" Bill sneered. Hickory rose slowly to his feet. His long legs unbending like a jackknife. "Wal, I didn't come across any army shavin' kits if that's what you mean, Daley?"

Bill flushed, "From now on keep your nose outta my pack."

"And that goes for you too mister." Jack didn't scare easy. His large hands doubled into fists. His body swayed. He was ready to tackle, fight or do both. Daley knew he could draw a bead on him before the kid blinked an eyelash. His finger pressured against the trigger.

"You won't get away with that," the kid said. "Some folks might be kinda certain you did your first partner in if the second one disappeared."

"How much is Quill payin' you to say this?" Daley snapped.

JACK'S face reddened. His lips compressed and he silenced his reply. Daley kept the rifle leveled. "How come you lied about being in the army?" he challenged.

The kid smirked. "That's a funny question comin' from a guy who can't answer fer what happened to his partner."

"Take your share and blow. The partnership is over," Bill declared.

The blue eyes flashed. "I reckon you handled Larson the same way. Followed him to Red Fox and made it look like Quill's job." Daley stood by the torn tarp of the window. The gun steady in his left hand and crooked over his bad arm for support. The movement of a finger tip would have split the tension.

Daley turned. He heard the sluice boxes rattle down at the mine. He rested the gun on his stiff arm and ripped the tarp aside for a look at the mine. His grey eyes went murderously cold as he caught a glimpse of Quill and his gang edging around the sluice boxes.

"Okay, that settles it," Daley said. "Quill is outside with his rats." The muzzle of the rifle tapped the kid's forehead. "Get out and tell 'em you got me tied up. Lead them by the door one at a time. An' tell 'em right or I'll blow your rotten guts out."

The kid moved slowly around the tense figure. His arm shot out quickly and he smacked the rifle from Bill's hands as the trigger jerked. There was a hollow plunking sound as the lead whipped through the canvas roof. The gun slipped from Daley's hands and a rock-like fist crashed him into blackness.

Jack jerked the rifle from limp fingers.

The kid's big frame blotted out the window space where the tarp had been. He heard Quill's voice. "Nice work kid." Quill turned to Al Logan and Hank Boley. He growled, "Wish I coulda plugged Daley myself."

He spat and hitched up his belt. Then he wiped his mouth in his sleeve. "C'mon," he snarled, "let's dance on the corpse." His partners followed him to the cabin. Quill jerked his head back once to look at the mine. "I hope they got a decent haul," he grumbled.

The kid watched them approach from the window. Suddenly the blood punched like a fist inside his head. He saw it. The white rifle in Quill's hand. His finger locked over the trigger of the Winchester as he stepped outside the cabin.

Quill saw the pale drawn face. He chuckled, "Uncork a shot of whiskey, Boley. He can't stomach a little action." The kid's blue eyes grew snake cold. "Where didya get the white rifle from, Quill?" He waved the whiskey aside. Boley's horse-like teeth showed. "Damn, didn't you all know that the chief was the best shot . . . why he picked off Larson from a hundred . . . ."

"Shut up!" Quill's big fist shot out like a hook full of meat. Boley crumpled to the ground. The whiskey bottle shattered on a rock. He looked up dazed. A gap stood where the horse-like teeth had been. "I didn't mean no harm, chief . . ." he muttered brokenly. Black hatred was deep into Boley's dark eyes.

"Let's take a look at the late mister Daley," Quill smiled.

Jack blocked the door. "Stand back." He pointed the rifle. Of the three of them only Logan had his gun drawn. Quill winked. The kid and Logan exchanged shots. Logan pitched forward. The kid had been faster.

Quill watched the blue smoke funnel from the kid's rifle with amazement. He saw the broad face stare at him defiantly with gun uplifted.

Quill saw the kid meant business. His thick fingers played lightly on the barrel of the kid's rifle. Calm and steady does it Quill thought. He'd been through a thousand such scrapes. His free hand fumbled along his belt. A Colt bulged in his back pocket. He smiled, "Kinda jumpy, ain't ya, kid? Didn't reckon ya wanted Logan's job that bad." Quill shrugged his heavy shoulders, "I seen you're a good shot. Okay," he nodded, "the job is yours."

Jack's nostrils dilated. "You murdered Carl Larson," he accused.

"What's it to ya?" Quill's meaty hand jammed down on the kid's rifle. The gun socked against the dirt. The kid stepped in fast with a crack to the jaw before Quill got the Colt half way from his back pocket. The heavy set man was jolted back, "This is what it's to me!" The kid plunged at Quill.

Stones, earth, and tufts of grass mingled with pounding fists. Hank Boley's dark eyes swam with delight as the men tore and punched like infuriated bears. He crawled to the battling figures. He waited, circled. His hand shot out and he jerked the Colt from Quill's pocket. Boley could have ended it for either man. But he waited patiently for the outcome. He could still feel the effects of the blow Quill had dealt him.

The kid winced as Quill's head shot up in close and gashed his cheek. The big fists drove like mallets and Quill's thumbs hooked into his eyes. Quill fought hard, dirty and fast. But the kid was determined. He knew he'd rather die than quit to Quill. He had waited a long time to find out his man. The kid backed off to let the air gasp into his lungs again. Quill slapped against the empty pocket which had held his Colt. He screamed frantically at Boley, "Shoot him down, stupid!"

Boley leaned impassively against a tree. His dark eyes glinting weirdly. He hoped that Jack would win. If Quill came through he knew he didn't have the guts to stand up to the chief.

Jack hurled all of his strength at Quill. The heavy body did not yield but suddenly Quill hit the ground and groaned loudly. Jack dove forward. A stomach full of hobnailed boots kicked the wind out of him as he staggered back and fell. He heard brutal laughter, "Didn't expect that!" Quill shouted as he came punching back.

The kid came off the ground in time to beat him off. Quill scooped up a lump of dirt. A lump of dirt with a rock in the center. He stepped in close. The kid's head shot back as the rock grazed his jaw. He went down and out.

Quill's enraged eyes flashed at Hank Boley. His big face had the wild stare of a beast. He ripped the gun from Boley's frightened fingers. Then he clubbed him over the head with the butt. Boley sagged to the ground and groaned.

Jed Quill aimed at the kid's head as Jack lay unconscious. "Drop that gun before you get hurt!" A nasty voice snapped from the cabin.

Quill whirled. He paled at the sight of Bill Daley.

"Surprised?" Daley sneered. "This is the second time you gave me up for dead." Quill's heart pounded. Daley's hate-twisted face was a murderous mask. Quill fired as Daley ducked. A knife plunged through the air. It quivered like an arrow in Quill's shooting hand. The big man yelled and dropped the gun.

"Five years made you forget how fast I was with a blade," Daley hissed. He moved forward slowly towards Quill. "Why dont'cha pull the knife out and throw it," Daley snapped. "And that's giving you the chance you never gave me."

Quill pulled the knife painfully from his bloodied palm. His eyes never left Daley's oncoming face. This guy must be mad to be walking in like this, Quill thought. He must pack a gun or else he's crazy. Quill held the knife awkwardly in his right hand.

THE BLADE zipped through air and Daley felt it brush the tip of his ear as he stepped away.

The knife hummed as it struck the cabin. Daley twisted around and grabbed it. Quill's eyes were tense with fear. Daley resumed his march again, this time with the knife held high and ready. Quill looked frantically about. There was a clump of trees bordering the creek. They stood like lonely sentinels and Quill ran to them for refuge. It was a short distance from the trees to the thickets.

Daley clutched his knife and swore. He felt like a man who had just been robbed. A few yards away Jack shook his head in an effort to come to. Over on the rock Hank Boley stirred back to life. Boley blinked his eyes at the disappearing figure of Quill. He grabbed the gun that Quill had dropped and he headed for the thickets.

The kid and Daley stared at each other when they heard four shots. Hank Boley crawled out of the thickets with the end of his gun smoking. His black eyes glinted, "I got the varmint."

Daley said, "Looks like you saved all of us the trouble."

"I did it for meself," Boley snapped. "Chuck the friendly act." His dark eyes shifted as he took in the partners. "And I don't aim to leave no evidence stalkin' around."

The kid shrugged. "I'm still for pinning a medal on ya for gettin' rid of the skunk."

Boley smiled unpleasantly, "That ain't the way your lame-armed friend feels about me. There's a lot of other deals he's got on me besides shootin' Quill up."

"Like helping to pick off the Indian who saw Larson murdered . . . heh Boley?" Daley taunted.

"Maybe . . ." Boley's unpleasant grin tightened. The wheels of his mind turned slowly. After long years of taking orders Boley wasn't used to thinking. His foes sensed this.

The kid walked towards him with uplifted hands. "I reckon we can iron out a few things without shootin'," the kid drawled.

"Keep back," Boley warned.

Daley's grey eyes flamed. "Duck!" he screamed. "Quill is comin' outta the woods!"

Boley whirled around gun in hand as Jack brought a rabbit punch down on the neck. The kid and Daley laughed as Boley fell on his hands and knees only to glance up in disappointment at not seeing Quill.

The gun was in Jack's hands now. The muzzle trained on Boley's fear-stricken face. "If you was involved in my Dad's murder then I can be persuaded to be-

come mighty interested in you too, Mister Boley," Jack said.

At last Bill Daley's puzzled expression cleared. So that was it. He should have known all along. Larson had told him the kid was in the army. Had even showed him a snapshot. "Spittin' image of the missus," Larson had said fondly. "Me and the kid were great pals. He'd go to hell and back for this old man of his." Larson had pointed proudly at himself.

To be expected to recall a face you saw on a blurred photo five years ago. That was too much. He was Larson's kid alright. The big shoulders, the smile, the army kit and the honest look that made him take the kid on when he showed up green and with nothing but a rifle. That was the way poor Carl looked, before Quill had plugged him.

He turned to Jack, "Why in blazes didn't you tell me you was Larson's boy? Carl was the only friend I ever had up here."

Jack smiled sheepishly. "I didn't know which side you were on until I caught sight of that gun in Quill's hands. I knew there wasn't one like it in these parts. Sent it to Dad as a birthday gift. Knew he'd never part with it. Boley here obliged with an explanation."

Bill Daley's eyes clouded. "When I think of how close I came to killin' you . . . figurin' you were workin' for Quill . . ." His voice trailed off.

"That's all right pard, I made some wrong calculations myself. Let's forget it and get goin' to Council with our live evidence here. Understand they got a new deputy there who's complainin' about nothin' to do. This case oughtta keep him busy for a while," Jack laughed.

They began preparations for the trip. It would be several weeks before they would be able to resume their gold digging. Perhaps it would be too late this year. The Arctic summer being what it was. Daley had waited a long time for gold but he didn't care. He had waited even a longer time for his enemy. Another year was worth waiting. There was one more thing that bothered him.

SOURDOUGH

In Alaska and Yukon Territory, the term "sourdough" is the synonym for pioneer; Old Timer, and so forth. First of all, a "sourdough" must have wintered in the Far North; he must have seen the break-up of the ice in the spring. He must literally have used the same kind of yeasty batter dough which our grandmothers used in making "flannel" cakes. For in '98 there were no handy yeast cakes on the creeks and benches; no trading post, perhaps, within a hundred miles.

Sour dough is living and continuing ferment. Our grandmothers used to make it from potato yeast. From the batter they would take out a small bit, and put it on the shelf in a warm place. By the next day it would be ready to use to leaven flapjacks. In the mineralized regions of Alaska and the Yukon, the "sourdough" kept this precious material in a covered stoneware bowl, if one could be obtained. Sometimes, in order to keep the yeast from freezing, he would take the bowl to bed with him!

You have heard of men who would walk a mile for a certain cigarette; well, a miner would walk ten miles to a neighbor's for a bit of sour dough. It meant his daily bread in the Far North.

"Kid, why did you tip Quill off as to my location?"

Jack looked at him with puzzled surprise. "How was I to know which one of you were guilty until I got you together for a showdown? They told me in town that you hated each other after you killed my Dad. They said you got the Indian too." The kid paused. "They said you finished Dad off 'cause he helped your wife run away to Quill."

Bill looked far away. "Your Dad went after Lola to persuade her to come back to me. Larson would do things like that." Daley's manner sharpened. "Now that you got what you came up here for I reckon you'll be leavin' for the States."

"What, and give up my share of the gold mine. I may be a chechako but I ain't that dumb," he said. His clear young eyes laughed with good nature.

William Mendoza Daley was silent but the look in his eyes matched the youthfulness of his partner's. Five years of bitterness seemed to have melted from his face.

LOVE OF LIFE

By JACK LONDON

This out of all will remain—
They have lived and have tossed,
So much of the game will be gain,
Though the gold of the dice has been lost.

THEY LIMPED painfully down the bank, and once the foremost of the two men staggered among the rough-strewn rocks. They were tired and weak, and their faces had the drawn expression of patience which comes of hardship long endured. They were heavily burdened with blanket packs which were strapped to their shoulders. Head straps, passing across the forehead, helped support these packs. Each man carried a rifle. They walked in a stooped posture, the shoulders well forward, their eyes bent upon the ground.

"I wish we had just about two of them cartridges that's layin' in that cache of ourn," said the second man.

His voice was utterly and drearily expressionless. He spoke without enthusiasm; and the first man, limping into the milky stream that foamed over the rocks, vouchsafed no reply.

The other man followed at his heels. They did not remove their footgear, though the water was icy cold—so cold that their ankles ached and their feet went numb. In places the water dashed against their knees, and both men staggered for footing.

The man who followed slipped on a smooth boulder, nearly fell, but recovered himself with a violent effort, at the same time uttering a sharp exclamation of pain. He seemed faint and dizzy and put out his free hand while he reeled, as though seeking support against the air. When he had steadied himself he stepped forward, but reeled again and nearly fell. Then he stood still and looked at the other man who had never turned his head.

The man stood still for fully a minute, as though debating with himself. Then he called out: "I say, Bill, I've sprained my ankle."

Bill staggered on through the milky water. He did not look around. The man watched him go, and though his face was expressionless as ever, his eyes were like the eyes of a wounded deer.

The other man limped up the farther bank and continued straight on without looking back. The man in the stream watched him. His lips trembled a little, so that the rough thatch of brown hair which covered them was visibly agitated. His tongue even strayed out to moisten them.

"Bill!" he cried out.

It was the pleading cry of a strong man in distress, but Bill's head did not turn. The man watched him go, limping grotesquely and lurching forward with stammering gait up the slow slope toward the soft sky line of the low-lying hill. He watched him go till he passed over the crest and disappeared. Then he turned his gaze and slowly took in the circle of the world that remained to him now that Bill was gone.

Near the horizon the sun was smoldering dimly, almost obscured by formless mists and vapors, which gave an impression of mass and density without outline or tangibility. The man pulled out his watch, the while resting his weight on one leg. It was four o'clock, and as the season

was near the last of July or first of August —he did not know the precise date within a week or two—he knew that the sun roughly marked the northwest.

He looked to the south and knew that somewhere beyond those bleak hills lay the Great Bear Lake; also he knew that in that direction the Arctic Circle cut its forbidding way across the Canadian Barrens. This stream in which he stood was a feeder to the Coppermine River, which in turn flowed north and emptied into Coronation Gulf and the Arctic Ocean. He had never been there, but he had seen it, once, on a Hudson's Bay Company chart.

Again his gaze completed the circle of the world about him. It was not a hearten-

ing spectacle. Everywhere was soft sky line. The hills were all low-lying. There were no trees, no shrubs, no grasses—naught but a tremendous and terrible desolation that sent fear swiftly dawning into his eyes.

"Bill!" he whispered, once and twice; "Bill!"

He cowered in the midst of the milky water, as though the vastness were pressing in upon him with overwhelming force, brutally crushing him with its complacent awfulness. He began to shake as with an ague fit, till the gun fell from his hand with a splash. This served to rouse him. He fought with his fear and pulled himself together, groping in the water and recovering the weapon.

He hitched his pack farther over on his left shoulder, so as to take a portion of its weight from off the injured ankle. Then he proceeded, slowly and carefully, wincing with pain, to the bank.

He did not stop. With a desperation that was madness, unmindful of the pain, he hurried up the slope to the crest of the hill over which his comrade had disappeared—more grotesque and comical by far than that limping, jerking comrade. But at the crest he saw a shallow valley, empty of life. He fought with his fear again, overcame it, hitched the pack still farther over on his left shoulder, and lurched on down the slope.

THE bottom of the valley was soggy with water, which the thick moss held, spongelike, close to the surface. This water squirted out from under his feet at every step, and each time he lifted a foot the action culminated in a sucking sound as the wet moss reluctantly released its grip. He picked his way from muskeg to muskeg, and followed the other man's footsteps along and across the rocky ledges which thrust like islets through the sea of moss.

Though alone, he was not lost. Farther on, he knew, he would come to where dead spruce and fir, very small and wizened, bordered the shore of a little lake, the *titchin-nichilie*, in the tongue of the country, the "land of little sticks." And into that lake flowed a small stream, the water of which was not milky. There was rush grass on that stream—this he remembered well—but no timber, and he would follow it till its first trickle ceased at a divide.

He would cross this divide to the first trickle of another stream, flowing to the west, which he would follow until it emptied into the river Dease, and here he would find a cache under an upturned canoe and piled over with many rocks. And in this cache would be ammunition for his empty gun, fishhooks and lines, a small net—all the utilities for the killing and snaring of food. Also he would find flour—not much—a piece of bacon, and some beans.

Bill would be waiting for him there, and they would paddle away south down the Dease to the Great Bear Lake. And south across the lake they would go, ever south, till they gained the Mackenzie. And south, still south, they would go, while the winter raced vainly after them, and the ice formed in the eddies, and the days grew chill and crisp, south to some warm Hudson's Bay Company post, where timber grew tall and generous and there was grub without end.

These were the thoughts of the man as he strove onward. But hard as he strove with his body, he strove equally hard with his mind, trying to think that Bill had not deserted him, that Bill would surely wait for him at the cache. He was compelled to think this thought, or else there would not be any use to strive, and he would have lain down and died.

And as the dim ball of the sun sank slowly into the northwest he covered every inch—and many times—of his and Bill's flight south before the downcoming winter. And he conned the grub of the cache and the grub of the Hudson's Bay Company post over and over again. He had not eaten for two days; for a far longer time he had not had all he wanted to eat. Often he stooped and picked pale muskeg berries, put them into his mouth, and chewed and swallowed them. A muskeg berry is a bit of seed enclosed in a bit of water. In the mouth the water melts away and the seed chews sharp and bitter. The man knew there was no nourishment in these berries,

but he chewed them patiently with a hope greater than knowledge and defying experience.

At nine o'clock he stubbed his toe on a rocky ledge, and from sheer weariness and weakness staggered and fell. He lay for some time, without movement, on his side. Then he slipped out of the pack straps and clumsily dragged himself into a sitting posture. It was not yet dark, and in the lingering twilight he groped about among the rocks for shreds of dry moss. When he had gathered a heap he built a fire—a smoldering smudgy fire—and put a tin pot of water on to boil.

He unwrapped his pack and the first thing he did was to count his matches. There were sixty-seven. He counted them three times to make sure. He divided them into several portions, wrapping them in oil paper, disposing of one bunch in his empty tobacco pouch, of another bunch in the inside band of his battered hat, of a third bunch under his shirt on the chest. This accomplished, a panic came upon him, and he unwrapped them all and counted them again. There were still sixty-seven.

He dried his wet footgear by the fire. The moccasins were in soggy shreds. The blanket socks were worn through in places, and his feet were raw and bleeding. His ankle was throbbing, and he gave it an examination. It had swollen to the size of his knee. He tore a long strip from one of his two blankets and bound the ankle tightly. He tore other strips and bound them about his feet to serve for both moccasins and socks. Then he drank the pot of water, steaming hot, wound his watch, and crawled between his blankets.

He slept like a dead man. The brief darkness around midnight came and went. The sun arose in the northeast—at least the day dawned in that quarter, for the sun was hidden by gray clouds.

AT six o'clock he awoke, quietly lying on his back. He gazed straight up into the gray sky and knew that he was hungry. As he rolled over on his elbow he was startled by a loud snort, and saw a bull caribou regarding him with alert curiosity. The animal was not more than fifty feet away, and instantly into the man's mind leaped the vision and the savor of a caribou steak sizzling and frying over a fire. Mechanically he reached for the empty gun, drew a bead, and pulled the trigger. The bull snorted and leaped away. his hoofs rattling and clattering as he fled across the ledges.

The man cursed and flung the empty gun from him. He groaned aloud as he started to drag himself to his feet. It was a slow and arduous task. His joints were like rusty hinges. They worked harshly in their sockets, with much friction, and each bending or unbending was accomplished only through a sheer exertion of will. When he finally gained his feet, another minute or so was consumed in straightening up, so that he could stand erect as a man should stand.

He crawled up a small knoll and surveyed the prospect. There were no trees, no bushes, nothing but a gray sea of moss scarcely diversified by gray rocks, gray lakelets, and gray streamlets. The sky was gray. There was no sun nor hint of sun.

He had no idea of north, and he had forgotten the way he had come to this spot the night before. But he was not lost. He knew that. Soon he would come to the land of the little sticks. He felt that it lay off to the left somewhere, not far—possibly just over the next low hill.

He went back to put his pack into shape for traveling. He assured himself of the existence of his three separate parcels of matches, though he did not stop to count them. But he did linger, debating, over a squat moose-hide sack. It was not large. He could hide it under his two hands. He knew that it weighed fifteen pounds—as much as all the rest of the pack—and it worried him.

He finally set it to one side and proceeded to roll the pack. He paused to gaze at the squat moose-hide sack. He picked it up hastily with a defiant glance about him, as though the desolation were trying to rob him of it; and when he arose to his feet to stagger on into the day, it was included in the pack on his back.

He bore away to the left, stopping now and again to eat muskeg berries. His ankle had stiffened, his limp was more pro-

nounced, but the pain of it was as nothing compared with the pain of his stomach. The hunger pangs were sharp. They gnawed and gnawed until he could not keep his mind steady on the course he must pursue to gain the land of little sticks. The muskeg berries did not allay this gnawing, while they made his tongue and the roof of his mouth sore with their irritating bite.

He came upon a valley where rock ptarmigan rose on whirring wings from the ledges and muskegs. "Ker—ker—ker" was the cry they made. He threw stones at them but could not hit them. He placed his pack on the ground and stalked them as a cat stalks a sparrow. The sharp rocks cut through his pants legs till his knees left a trail of blood; but the hurt was lost in the hurt of his hunger. He squirmed over the wet moss, saturating his clothes and chilling his body; but he was not aware of it, so great was his fever for food. And always the ptarmigan rose, whirring, before him, till their "Ker—ker—ker" became a mock to him, and he cursed them and cried aloud at them with their own cry.

Once he crawled upon one that must have been asleep. He did not see it till it shot up in his face from its rocky nook. He made a clutch as startled as was the rise of the ptarmigan, and there remained in his hand three tail feathers. As he watched its flight he hated it, as though it had done him some terrible wrong. Then he returned and shouldered his pack.

As the day wore along he came into valleys or swales where game was more plentiful. A band of caribou passed by, twenty and odd animals, tantalizingly within rifle range. He felt a wild desire to run after them, a certitude that he could run them down. A black fox came toward him, carrying a ptarmigan in his mouth. The man shouted. It was a fearful cry, but the fox, leaping away in fright, did not drop the ptarmigan.

Late in the afternoon he followed a stream, milky with lime, which ran through sparse patches of rush grass. Grasping these rushes firmly near the root, he pulled up what resembled a young onion sprout no larger than a shingle nail. It was tender, and his teeth sank into it with a crunch that promised deliciously of food. But its fibers were tough. It was composed of stringy filaments saturated with water, like the berries, and devoid of nourishment. He threw off his pack and went into the rush grass on hands and knees, crunching and munching, like some bovine creature.

He was very weary and often wished to rest—to lie down and sleep; but he was continually driven on, not so much by his desire to gain the land of little sticks as by his hunger. He searched little ponds for frogs and dug up the earth with his nails for worms, though he knew in spite that neither frogs nor worms existed so far north.

He looked into every pool of water vainly, until, as the long twilight came on, he discovered a solitary fish, the size of a minnow, in such a pool. He plunged his arm in up to the shoulder, but it eluded him. He reached for it with both hands and stirred up the milky mud at the bottom. In his excitement he fell in, wetting himself to the waist. Then the water was too muddy to admit of his seeing the fish, and he was compelled to wait until the sediment had settled.

THE pursuit was renewed, till the water was again muddied. But he could not wait. He unstrapped the tin bucket and began to bail the pool. He bailed wildly at first, splashing himself and flinging the water so short a distance that it ran into the pool. He worked more carefully, striving to be cool, though his heart was pounding against his chest and his hands were trembling, At the end of half an hour the pool was nearly dry. Not a cupful of water remained. And there was no fish. He found a hidden crevice among the stones through which it had escaped to the adjoining and larger pool—a pool which he could not empty in a night and day. Had he known of the crevice, he could have closed it with a rock at the beginning and the fish would have been his.

Thus he thought, and crumpled up and sank down upon the wet earth. At first he cried softly to himself, then he cried loud-

ly to the pitiless desolation that ringed him around; and for a long time after he was shaken by great dry sobs.

He built a fire and warmed himself by drinking quarts of hot water, and made camp on a rocky ledge in the same fashion he had the night before. The last thing he did was to see that his matches were dry and to wind his watch. The blankets were wet and clammy. His ankle pulsed with pain. But he knew only that he was hungry, and through his restless sleep he dreamed of feasts and banquets and of food served and spread in all imaginable ways.

He awoke chilled and sick. There was no sun. The gray of earth and sky had become deeper, more profound. A raw wind was blowing, and the first flurries of snow were whitening the hilltops. The air about him thickened and grew white while he made a fire and boiled more water. It was wet snow, half rain, and the flakes were large and soggy. At first they melted as soon as they came in contact with the earth, but ever more fell, covering the ground, putting out the fire, spoiling his supply of moss fuel.

This was a signal for him to strap on his pack and stumble onward, he knew not where. He was not concerned with the land of little sticks, nor with Bill and the cache under the upturned canoe by the river Dease. He was mastered by the verb "to eat." He was hunger-mad. He took no heed of the course he pursued, so long as that course led him through the swale bottoms. He felt his way through the wet snow to the watery muskeg berries, and went by feel as he pulled up the rush grass by the roots. But it was tasteless stuff and did not satisfy. He found a weed that tasted sour and he ate all he could find of it, which was not much, for it was a creeping growth, easily hidden under the several inches of snow.

He had no fire that night, nor hot water, and crawled under his blanket to sleep the broken hunger sleep. The snow turned into a cold rain. He awakened many times to feel it falling on his upturned face. Day came—a gray day and no sun. It had ceased raining. The keenness of his hunger had departed. Sensibility, as far as concerned the yearning for food, had been exhausted. There was a dull, heavy ache in his stomach, but it did not bother him so much. He was more rational, and once more he was chiefly interested in the land of little sticks and the cache by the river Dease.

He ripped the remnant of one of his blankets into strips and bound his bleeding feet. Also he recinched the injured ankle and prepared himself for a day of travel. When he came to his pack he paused long over the squat moose-hide sack, but in the end it went with him.

The snow had melted under the rain, and only the hilltops showed white. The sun came out, and he succeeded in locating the points of the compass, though he knew now that he was lost. Perhaps, in his previous days' wanderings, he had edged away to far to the left. He now bore off to the right to counteract the possible deviation from his true course.

Though the hunger pangs were no longer so exquisite, he realized that he was weak. He was compelled to pause for frequent rests, when he attacked the muskeg berries and rush-grass patches. His tongue felt dry and large, as though covered with a fine hairy growth, and it tasted bitter in his mouth. His heart gave him a great deal of trouble. When he had traveled a few minutes it would begin a remorseless thump, thump, thump, and then leap up and away in a painful flutter of beats that choked him and made him go faint and dizzy.

IN the middle of the day he found two minnows in a large pool. It was impossible to bail it, but he was calmer now and managed to catch them in his tin bucket. They were no longer than his little finger, but he was not particularly hungry. The dull ache in his stomach had been growing duller and fainter. It seemed almost that his stomach was dozing. He ate the fish raw, masticating with painstaking care, for the eating was an act of pure reason. While he had no desire to eat, he knew that he must eat to live.

In the evening he caught three more minnows, eating two and saving the third for breakfast. The sun had dried stray

shreds of moss, and he was able to warm himself with hot water. He had not covered more than ten miles that day; and the next day, traveling whenever his heart permitted him, he covered no more than five miles. But his stomach did not give him the slightest uneasiness. It had gone to sleep. He was in a strange country, too, and the caribou were growing more plentiful, also the wolves. Often their yelps drifted across the desolation, and once he saw three of them slinking away before his path.

Another night; and in the morning, being more rational, he untied the leather string that fastened the squat moose-hide sack. From its open mouth poured a yellow stream of coarse gold dust and nuggets. He roughly divided the gold in halves, caching one half on a prominent ledge, wrapped in a piece of blanket, and returning the other half to the sack. He also began to use strips of the one remaining blanket for his feet. He still clung to his gun, for there were cartridges in that cache by the river Dease.

This was a day of fog, and this day hunger awoke in him again. He was very weak and was afflicted with a giddiness which at times blinded him. It was no uncommon thing now for him to stumble and fall; and stumbling once, he fell squarely into a ptarmigan nest. There were four newly hatched chicks, a day old—little specks of pulsating life no more than a mouthful; and he ate them ravenously, thrusting them alive into his mouth and crunching them like eggshells between his teeth.

The mother ptarmigan beat about him with great outcry. He used his gun as a club with which to knock her over, but she dodged out of reach. He threw stones at her and with one chance shot broke a wing. Then she fluttered away, running, trailing the broken wing, with him in pursuit.

The little chicks had no more than whetted his appetite. He hopped and bobbed clumsily along on his injured ankle, throwing stones and screaming hoarsely at times; at other times hopping and bobbing silently along, picking himself up grimly and patiently when he fell, or rubbing his eyes with his hand when the giddiness threatened to overpower him.

The chase led him across swampy ground in the bottom of the valley, and he came upon footprints in the soggy moss. They were not his own—he could see that. They must be Bill's. But he could not stop, for the mother ptarmigan was running on. He would catch her first, then he would return and investigate.

He exhausted the mother ptarmigan; but he exhausted himself. She lay panting on her side. He lay panting on his side, a dozen feet away, unable to crawl to her. And as he recovered she recovered, fluttering out of reach as his hungry hand went out to her. The chase was resumed. Night settled down and she escaped. He stumbled from weakness and pitched head foremost on his face, cutting his cheek, his pack upon his back. He did not move for a long while; then he rolled over on his side, wound his watch, and lay there until morning.

Another day of fog. Half of his last blanket had gone into foot-wrappings. He failed to pick up Bill's trail. It did not matter. His hunger was driving him too compellingly—only—only he wondered if Bill, too, were lost. By midday the irk of his pack became too oppressive. Again he divided the gold, this time merely spilling half of it on the ground. In the afternoon he threw the rest of it away, there remaining to him only the half blanket, the tin bucket and the rifle.

A hallucination began to trouble him. He felt confident that one cartridge remained to him. It was in the chamber of the rifle and he had overlooked it. On the other hand, he knew all the time that the chamber was empty. But the hallucination persisted. He fought it off for hours, then threw his rifle open and was confronted with emptiness. The disappointment was as bitter as though he had really expected to find the cartridge.

He plodded on for half an hour, when the hallucination arose again. Again he fought it, and still it persisted, till for very relief he opened his rifle to unconvince himself. At times his mind wandered farther afield, and he plodded on, a mere automaton, strange conceits and whimsi-

calities gnawing at his brain like worms. But these excursions out of the real were of brief duration, for ever the pangs of the hunger bite called him back.

He was jerked back abruptly once from such an excursion by a sight that caused him nearly to faint. He reeled and swayed, doddering like a drunken man to keep from falling. Before him stood a horse. A horse! He could not believe his eyes. A thick mist was in them, intershot with sparkling points of light. He rubbed his eyes savagely to clear his vision, and beheld not a horse but a great brown bear. The animal was studying him with bellicose curiosity.

The man had brought his gun halfway to his shoulder before he realized. He lowered it and drew his hunting knife from its beaded sheath at his hip. Before him was meat and life. He ran his thumb along the edge of his knife. It was sharp. The point was sharp. He would fling himself upon the bear and kill it. But his heart began its warning thump, thump, thump. Then followed the wild upward leap and tattoo of flutters, the pressing as of an iron band about his forehead, the creeping of the dizziness into his brain.

His desperate courage was evicted by a great surge of fear. In his weakness, what if the animal attacked him? He drew himself up to his most imposing stature, gripping the knife and staring hard at the bear. The bear advanced clumsily a couple of steps, reared up, and gave vent to a tentative growl. If the man ran, he would run after him; but the man did not run. He was animated now with the courage of fear. He, too, growled, savagely, terribly, voicing the fear that is to life germane and that lies twisted about life's deepest roots.

THE BEAR edged away to one side, growling menacingly, himself appalled by this mysterious creature that appeared upright and unafraid. But the man did not move. He stood like a statue till the danger was past, when he yielded to a fit of trembling and sank down into the wet moss.

He pulled himself together and went on, afraid now in a new way. It was not the fear that he should die passively from lack of food, but that he should be destroyed violently before starvation had exhausted that last particle of the endeavor in him that made toward surviving. There were the wolves. Back and forth across the desolation drifted their howls, weaving the very air into a fabric of menace that was so tangible that he found himself, arms in the air, pressing it back from him as it might be the walls of a wind-blown tent.

Now and again the wolves, in packs of two and three, crossed his path. But they sheered clear of him. They were not in sufficient numbers, and besides, they were hunting the caribou, which did not battle, while this strange creature that walked erect might scratch and bite.

In the late afternoon he came upon scattered bones where the wolves had made a kill. The debris had been a caribou calf an hour before, squawking and running and very much alive. He contemplated the bones, clean-picked and polished, pink with the cell of life in them which had not yet died. Could it possibly be that he might be that ere the day was done! Such was life, eh? A vain and fleeting thing. It was only life that pained. There was no hurt in death. To die was to sleep. It meant cessation, rest. Then why was he not content to die?

But he did not moralize long. He was squatting in the moss, a bone in his mouth, sucking at the shreds of life that still dyed it faintly pink. The sweet meaty taste, thin and elusive almost as a memory, maddened him. He closed his jaws on the bones and crunched. Sometimes it was the bone that broke, sometimes his teeth. Then he crushed the bones between rocks, pounded them to a pulp, and swallowed them. He pounded his fingers, too, in his haste, and yet found a moment in which to feel surprise at the fact that his fingers did not hurt much when caught under the descending rock.

Came frightful days of snow and rain. He did not know when he made camp, when he broke camp. He traveled in the night as much as in the day. He rested wherever he fell, crawled on whenever the dying life in him flickered up and burned less dimly. He, as a man, no longer

strove. It was the life in him, unwilling to die, that drove him on. He did not suffer. His nerves had become blunted, numb, while his mind was filled with weird visions and delicious dreams.

But ever he sucked and chewed on the crushed bones of the caribou calf, the least remnants of which he had gathered up and carried with him. He crossed no more hills or divides, but automatically followed a large stream which flowed through a wide and shallow valley. He did not see this stream nor this valley. He saw nothing save visions. Soul and body walked or crawled side by side, yet apart, so slender was the thread that bound them.

He awoke in his right mind, lying on his back on a rocky ledge. The sun was shining bright and warm. Afar off he heard the squawking of caribou calves. He was aware of vague memories of rain and wind and snow, but whether he had been beaten by the storm for two days or two weeks he did not know.

For some time he lay without movement, the genial sunshine pouring upon him and saturating his miserable body with its warmth. A fine day, he thought. Perhaps he could manage to locate himself. By a painful effort he rolled over on his side. Below him flowed a wide sluggish river. Its unfamiliarity puzzled him. Slowly he followed it with his eyes, winding in wide sweeps among the bleak, bare hills, bleaker and barer and lower-lying than any hills he had yet encountered. Slowly, deliberately, without excitement or more than the most casual interest, he followed the course of the strange stream toward the sky line and saw it emptying into a bright and shining sea.

He was still unexcited. Most unusual, he thought, a vision or a mirage—more likely a vision, a trick of his disordered mind. He was confirmed in this by sight of a ship lying at anchor in the midst of the shining sea. He closed his eyes for a while, then opened them. Strange how the vision persisted! Yet not strange. He knew there were no seas or ships in the heart of the barren lands, just as he had known there was no cartridge in the empty rifle.

He heard a snuffe behind him—a half-choking gasp or cough. Very slowly, because of his exceeding weakness and stiffness, he rolled over on his other side. He could see nothing near at hand, but he waited patiently. Again came the snuffle and cough, and outlined between two jagged rocks not a score of feet away he made out the gray head of a wolf. The sharp ears were not pricked so sharply as he had seen them on other wolves; the eyes were bleared and bloodshot, the head seemed to droop limply and forlornly. The animal blinked continually in the sunshine. It seemed sick. As he looked it snuffled and coughed again.

This, at least, was real, he thought, and turned on the other side so that he might see the reality of the world which had been veiled from him before by the vision. But the sea still shone in the distance and the ship was plainly discernible. Was it reality after all? He closed his eyes for a long while and thought, and then it came to him. He had been making north by east, away from the Dease Divide and into the Coppermine Valley. This wide and sluggish river was the Coppermine. That shining sea was the Arctic Ocean. That ship was a whaler, strayed east, far east, from the mouth of the Mackenzie, and it was lying at anchor in Coronation Gulf. He remembered the Hudson's Bay Company chart he had seen long ago, and it was all clear and reasonable to him.

HE sat up and turned his attention to immediate affairs. He had worn through the blanket wrappings, and his feet were shapeless lumps of raw meat. His last blanket was gone. Rifle and knife were both missing. He had lost his hat somewhere, with the bunch of matches in the band, but the matches against his chest were safe and dry inside the tobacco pouch and oil paper. He looked at his watch. It marked eleven o'clock and was still running. Evidently he had kept it wound.

He was calm and collected. Though extremely weak, he had no sensation of pain. He was not hungry. The thought of food was not even pleasant to him, and whatever he did was done by his reason alone. He ripped off his pants legs to the knees

and bound them about his feet. Somehow he had succeded in retaining the tin bucket. He would have some hot water before he began what he foresaw was to be a terrible journey to the ship.

His movements were slow. He shook as with palsy. When he started to collect dry moss he found he could not rise to his feet. He tried again and again, then contented himself with crawling about on hands and knees. Once he crawled near to the sick wolf. The animal dragged itself reluctantly out of his way, licking its chops with a tongue which seemed hardly to have the strength to curl. The man noticed that the tongue was not the customary healthy red. It was a yellowish brown and seemed coated with a rough and half-dry mucus.

After he had drunk a quart of hot water the man found he was able to stand, and even to walk as well as a dying man might be supposed to walk. Every minute or so he was compelled to rest. His steps were feeble and uncertain, just as the wolf's that trailed him were feeble and uncertain; and that night, when the shining sea was blotted out by blackness, he knew he was nearer to it by no more than four miles.

Throughout the night he heard the cough of the sick wolf, and now and then the squawking of the caribou calves. There was life all around him, but it was strong life, very much alive and well, and he knew the sick wolf clung to the sick man's trail in the hope that the man would die first. In the morning, on opening his eyes, he beheld it regarding him with a wistful and hungry stare. It stood crouched, with tail between its legs, like a miserable and woebegone dog. It shivered in the chill morning wind and grinned dispiritedly when the man spoke to it in a voice that achieved no more than a hoarse whisper.

The sun rose brightly, and all morning the man tottered and fell toward the ship on the shining sea. The weather was perfect. It was the brief Indian summer of the high latitudes. It might last a week. Tomorrow or next day it might be gone.

In the afternoon the man came upon a trail. It was of another man, who did not walk, but who dragged himself on all fours. The man thought it might be Bill, but he thought in a dull, uninterested way. He had no curiosity. In fact sensation and emotion had left him. He was no longer susceptible to pain. Stomach and nerves had gone to sleep. Yet the life that was in him drove him on. He was very weary, but it refused to die. It was because it refused to die that he still ate muskeg berries and minnows, drank his hot water, and kept a wary eye on the sick wolf.

He followed the trail of the other man who dragged himself along, and soon came to the end of it—a few fresh-picked bones where the soggy moss was marked by the foot pads of many wolves. He saw a squat moose-hide sack, mate to his own, which had been torn by sharp teeth. He picked it up, though its weight was almost too much for his feeble fingers. Bill had carried it to the last. Ha-ha! He would have the laugh on Bill. He would survive and carry it to the ship in the shining sea. His mirth was hoarse and ghastly, like a raven's croak, and the sick wolf joined him, howling lugubriously. The man ceased suddenly. How could he have the laugh on Bill if that were Bill; if those bones, so pinky-white and clean, were Bill?

He turned away. Well, Bill had deserted him; but he would not take the gold, nor would he suck Bill's bones. Bill would have, though, had it been the other way around, he mused as he staggered on.

He came to a pool of water. Stooping over in quest of minnows, he jerked his head back as though he had been stung. He had caught sight of his reflected face. So horrible was it that sensibility awoke long enough to be shocked. There were three minnows in the pool, which was too large to drain; and after several ineffectual attempts to catch them in the tin bucket he forbore. He was afraid, because of his great weakness, that he might fall in and drown. It was for this reason that he did not trust himself to the river astride one of the many drift logs which lined its sandspits.

That day he decreased the distance between him and the ship by three miles; the next day by two—for he was crawling now as Bill had crawled; and the end of

the fifth day found the ship still seven miles away and him unable to make even a mile a day. Still the Indian summer held on, and he continued to crawl and faint, turn and turn about; and ever the sick wolf coughed and wheezed at his heels. His knees had become raw meat like his feet, and though he padded them with the shirt from his back it was a red track he left behind him on the moss and stones. Once, glancing back, he saw the wolf licking hungrily his bleeding trail, and he saw sharply what his own end might be—unless—unless he could get the wolf. Then began as grim a tragedy of existence as was ever played—a sick man that crawled, a sick wolf that limped, two creatures dragging their dying carcasses across the desolation and hunting each other's lives.

HAD it been a well wolf, it would not have mattered so much to the man; but the thought of going to feed the maw of that loathsome and all but dead thing was repugnant to him. He was finicky. His mind had begun to wander again and to be perplexed by hallucinations, while his lucid intervals grew rarer and shorter.

He was awakened once from a faint by a wheeze close in his ear. The wolf leaped lamely back, losing its footing and falling in its weakness. It was ludicrous, but he was not amused. Nor was he even afraid. He was too far gone for that. But his mind was for the moment clear, and he lay and considered. The ship was no more than four miles away. He could see it quite distinctly when he rubbed the mists out of his eyes, and he could see the white sail of a small boat cutting the water of the shining sea.

But he could never crawl those four miles. He knew that, and was very calm in the knowledge. He knew that he could not crawl half a mile. And yet he wanted to live. It was unreasonable that he should die after all he had undergone. Fate asked too much of him. And, dying, he declined to die. It was stark madness, perhaps, but in the very grip of death he defied death and refused to die.

He closed his eyes and composed himself with infinite precaution. He steeled himself to keep above the suffocating languor that lapped like a rising tide through all the wells of his being. It was very like a sea, this deadly languor that rose and rose and drowned his consciousness bit by bit. Sometimes he was all but submerged, swimming through oblivion with a faltering stroke; and again, by some strange alchemy of soul, he would find another shred of will and strike out more strongly.

Without movement he lay on his back, and he could hear, slowly drawing near and nearer, the wheezing intake and output of the sick wolf's breath. It drew closer, ever closer, through an infiinitude of time, and he did not move. It was at his ear. The harsh dry tongue grated like sandpaper against his cheek. His hands shot out—or at least he willed them to shoot out. The fingers were curved like talons, but they closed on empty air. Swiftness and certitude require strength, and the man had not this strength.

The patience of the wolf was terrible. The man's patience was no less terrible. For half a day he lay motionless, fighting off unconsciousness and waiting for the thing that was to feed upon him and upon which he wished to feed. Sometimes the languid sea rose over him and he dreamed long dreams; but ever through it all, waking and dreaming, he waited for the wheezing breath and the harsh caress of the tongue.

He did not hear the breath, and he slipped slowly from some dream to the feel of the tongue along his hand. He waited. The fangs pressed softly; the pressure increased; the wolf was exerting its last strength in an effort to sink teeth in the food for which it had waited so long. But the man had waited long, and the lacerated hand closed on the jaw. Slowly, while the wolf struggled feebly and the hand clutched feebly, the other hand crept across to a grip.

Five minutes later the whole weight of the man's body was on top of the wolf. The hands had not sufficient strength to choke the wolf, but the face of the man was pressed close to the throat of the wolf and the mouth of the man was full of hair. At the end of half an hour the man was

aware of a warm trickle in his throat. It was not pleasant. It was like molten lead being forced into his stomach, and it was forced by his will alone. Later the man rolled over on his back and slept.

There were some members of a scientific expedition on the whaleship *Bedford*. From the deck they remarked a strange object on the shore. It was moving down the beach toward the water. They were unable to classify it, and, being scientific men, they climbed into the whaleboat alongside and went ashore to see. And they saw something that was alive but which could hardly be called a man. It was blind, unconscious. It squirmed along the ground like some monstrous worm. Most of its efforts were ineffectual, but it was persistent, and it writhed and twisted and went ahead perhaps a score of feet an hour.

Three weeks afterward the man lay in a bunk on the whaleship *Bedford*, and with tears streaming down his wasted cheeks told who he was and what he had undergone. He also babbled incoherently of his mother, of sunny southern California, and a home among the orange groves and flowers.

The days were not many after that when he sat at table with the scientific men and ship's officers. He gloated over the spectacle of so much food, watching it anxiously as it went into the mouths of others. With the disappearance of each mouthful an expression of deep regret came into his eyes. He was quite sane, yet he hated those men at mealtime. He was haunted by a fear that the food would not last. He inquired of the cook, the cabin boy, the captain, concerning the food stores. They reassured him countless times; but he could not believe them, and pried cunningly about the lazaret to see with his own eyes.

It was noticed that the man was getting fat.

He grew stouter with each day. The scientific men shook their heads and theorized. They limited the man at his meals, but still his girth increased and he swelled prodigiously under his shirt.

The sailors grinned. They knew. And when the scientific men set a watch on the man they knew. They saw him slouch for'ard after breakfast, and, like a mendicant, with outstretched palm, accost a sailor. The sailor grinned and passed him a fragment of sea biscuit. He clutched it avariciously, looked at it as a miser looks at gold, and thrust it into his shirt bosom. Similar were the donations from other grinning sailors.

The scientific men were discreet. They let him alone. But they privily examined his bunk. It was lined with hardtack; the mattress was stuffed with hardtack; every nook and cranny was filled with hardtack. Yet he was sane. He was taking precautions against another possible famine—that was all. He would recover from it, the scientific men said; and he did, ere the *Bedford's* anchor rumbled down in San Francisco Bay.

BEAT THE CHILL

The Eskimo winter costume is the best—for that particular climate—that has ever been created. In storm and wind and cold there is nothing so warm, light, windproof, and comfortable. Their boots are made of caribou or seal skin, with soles of killiluak (white whale), ugruk, or walrus hide. The soles are crimped and rolled over the foot, like the Indian moccasin. The attegi (hooded shirt; parka) is made in two separate sections—an inner shirt of summer-killed caribou, worn with the hair inside, next the bare skin; and an outer shirt, made of fall-killed caribou, worn with the hair out. Thus there is an air space between the two shirts. A wide ruff of wolverine fur encircles the face and protects it from a side wind.

Mittens are made of wolf, dog, caribou, and polar-bear cub skins, with a yoke of cord over the neck to guard against loss. Trousers of caribou skin, reaching from the waist half-way between the knee and the ankle, complete the costume. (In Siberia the natives make them full length and skin tight, and the boots are made very short.) Socks of caribou fawn, mountain sheep, or the skin of the Arctic hare are worn inside the boots, reaching half-way to the knees. The insoles are formed by hand of Arctic grass; they are fluffed out and dried after a journey. Over the attegi, in stormy weather, the Eskimo wears a snow-shirt of cotton drill or walrus intestines to keep snow from penetrating the fur.

THE NORSEMEN: *DISCOVERERS OF AMERICA*

By BURT M. McCONNELL

THE FIRST European colonization project in the New World was located, not at Jamestown or Plymouth Rock, but several hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. And the first republic was Greenland, whose government was formed almost eight hundred years before that of the United States. How and why several thousand Greenland colonists disappeared, without trace, in the fourteenth century is one of the unsolved mysteries of the Arctic. Did they emigrate to the continent of North America—to Wineland the Good? Or were they wiped out in Greenland by a pestilence such as the Black Death, which swept over Norway in the fourteenth century?

Cut off from their homeland for a hundred years, and thrown on their own resources, were the colonists absorbed by the Eskimos? Or did the long-suffering natives, wearied of their tyranical overlords, exterminate them? No one knows—definitely; but when the country was rediscovered in the seventeenth century, all traces of the Norsemen had disappeared. Only Eskimos were to be found.

Any discussion of Greenland should start with Iceland. For that is where Erik Thorwaldson, discoverer and colonizer of Greenland, lived. Known as Erik the Red, he was a tempestuous soul: He had killed, in a fair fight, a neighbor who had slain some of his slaves. Challenged by a professional avenger of wrongs, Erik had killed this man, too. He was obliged to flee. Before he sailed away, he deposited with a neighbor, for safe-keeping, a precious heirloom—the ornamented pillars of his highseat. Thinking that Erik would not return, this neighbor incorporated these pillars in his house. Encouraged by his friends, Erik returned to the district and took the pillars by force. A fight resulted, in which several people were killed, including two of the neighbor's sons. Erik was outlawed by the district court for three years.

The court's decision did not suit the neighbor, and he gathered a band of sympathizers for the purpose of taking the law into his own hands. But Erik's friends hid him away, put his ship in order, and loaded it with provisions for a long cruise. When the excitement had died down, Erik and his family set sail to the westward. Eventually he reached Greenland, and sailed five hundred miles down the east coast and a thousand miles up the west coast. His vessel had no deck, and Erik had no compass. In the opinion of Nansen, who was one of the world's greatest explorers, on this voyage into the unknown Erik proved himself to be one of the boldest and most resourceful navigators of all time.

Erik's discovery of Greenland took place in the year 982; this is the first authentic date in American history. The land which he discovered is a part of the Western Hemisphere; and it lies just as close to the American mainland as do most of those islands upon the discovery of which the fame of Columbus is founded. He supported, not only his small crew, but his wife and child by hunting and fishing. He spent three years in exploring Greenland, and found, a hundred miles northwest of Cape Farewell, abundant pasture land covered by rich grass. He found salmon, cod, and other fish; seals, walrus, geese, and ducks; caribou, polar bears, Arctic hares, and ptarmigan. Near the inner end of a long fjord he built his home, Brattahlid—meaning "the steep slope." The foundations of the buildings may still be seen.

His three years of banishment ended, Erik returned to Iceland. He was received

with much honor when he arrived there and reported his discoveries. He proved to be as competent a colonizer as he was an explorer: Twenty-five vessels, filled with colonists, their livestock, food, and other possessions, set sail with him for Greenland the next year. But a great storm was encountered on the voyage, and only fourteen vessels reached Greenland. Here a colony was founded that survived for four hundred and fifty years. The original settlement, where Erik lived, was known as the Eastern Settlement; the Western Settlement lay about three hundred miles to the northwest, in the present Godthaab District.

THESE two districts comprised a republic of the simplest kind. In the Eastern Settlement there are said to have been 190 homesteads; and 90 in the Western Settlement. Erik was the acknowledged leader, and there is no record of dissension during the twenty years of his rule. He died in the year 1005.

The population of the two settlements, at its highest peak, probably was not more than 6,000; yet there were 12 churches in the Eastern Settlement, together with a monastery and nunnery; and four churches in the Western Settlement. Erik's wife had the first of these churches built; and his son Leif brought two priests from Norway.

One of their neighbors—and an original settler—was Herjulf Bardsson. His son, Bjarne Herjulfson, owned his own vessel, and spent every alternate winter with his parents. On his return to Iceland, Bjarne learned of the departure of his father, and set sail for Greenland. For several days they were unable to get their bearings because of fog; then a north wind carried them far to the southwest. Bjarne ultimately got his bearings, and headed back toward Greenland. He saw land three times on the return voyage: The first was flat, covered with timber, with small knolls; but they did not go ashore. After sailing northward for two days, they saw another land, also flat and covered with timber; they went on. Heading northeast before a stiff southwesterly breeze, they sailed for three days before they sighted land again. This was high and rocky. Manifestly it was not Greenland, and Bjarne kept on his course for four more days, under full sail. This brought him to the Cape Farewell region.

So runs the saga of Bjarne Herjulfson. Unless it is pure fabrication, the first land he sighted must have been Cape Cod, the second Nova Scotia, and the third Newfoundland. It required nine days' steady sailing, in a northeasterly direction, with a good wind, for them to get back to Greenland. At the standard speed of 150 miles a day, this amounts to 1,350 miles. If we add 265 miles, sailed in circumnavigating Newfoundland, we have a total of 1,615 miles—which is the approximate distance from Greenland to Bjarne's first landfall.

These descriptions, sailing directions, and distances were made a matter of record hundreds of years before there were any maps; the narrative is a clear and concise statement of existing facts and conditions. It shows that someone must have sailed this route and observed the things that go to make up the saga. It is excellent proof of the discovery, from a distance, of America. Why should one doubt that Bjarne Herjulfson sighted Cape Cod, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland in the year 986? (Erik's son, Leif, who is generally credited with having made the first voyage of discovery to America, was then six years old.) Bjarne was in a hurry to reach Greenland before winter set in; to him the new land meant nothing. He told his father and the neighbors about it, but made no plans to return.

On the other hand, some fifteen years later the youthful Leif Eriksson visualized a colony even greater than his father's in Greenland. The winters would be milder, the fishing no doubt would be better, they would need less fuel for heating their houses—and there would be plenty of timber for building larger ships. Although he consulted with Bjarne, and even purchased the latter's boat for making the voyage to the new land, Leif Eriksson should be credited with the discovery of America because it was he who first landed on its shores.

After a score of winters spent in Iceland and Greenland, no doubt the mild climate and the possibility of farming in the new land appealed to him. He might even be able to grow wheat there—and wheat and other farm products were a luxury which the Greenlanders had to forego.

There is no record of Leif's first meeting with Bjarne, but it probably came about in this way: In 999, when Leif was a mere stripling of 19, he decided to make the first direct voyage between Greenland and Norway, instead of stopping at Iceland. No one, of his own volition, had ever made such a long sea journey. With the small open boats which were then in use, and with limited space for carrying fresh water and provisions, a voyage of two thousand miles was considered too risky. The Norsemen had no compass, no instruments of any kind for finding their position at sea; they could only sail by the sun, moon, and stars. How they were able to find their way for days and weeks at a time, in fog, and storm and darkness, when the sun, moon, and stars were invisible, is difficult for us to understand. But they did it. Sometimes they drifted for days without knowing their position.

Even when they emerged from fog into sunlight, they could not determine their direction accurately unless they knew the time of day. They might lay a bowl of water on a thwart to determine when the boat lay on an even keel, and thus obtain a fair idea of the sun's altitude. They might also have learned of the use of the hour-glass through the simple expedient of plundering a monastery in southern Europe and thus be able to measure the length of the day. They did use the lead for taking soundings; and each ship was equipped with an anchor. But until the thirteenth century, when the lodestones, or compass, reached the Norwegians, an ocean voyage was a hazardous undertaking.

Leif's deliberate attempt to steer straight across the Atlantic marked the beginning of ocean voyages. But it was not completely successful, according to the saga; he was driven out of his course to the Hebrides. The writer of the saga, with the well-known predilection of the craft for embellishment, even goes so far as to say that Leif there fell in love with a woman of high lineage, but declined to take her with him when he sailed late that summer, although she informed him that she was carrying his child. Leif is said to have given her a gold ring, and to have continued on to Norway.

King Olaf made Leif a member of his bodyguard, and persuaded him to accept Christianity. In the spring the King commissioned him to return to Greenland, and to establish Christianity there. Two priests accompanied him. Leif was tactful and persuasive in bringing the settlers into the fold. He made many journeys along the west coast and it is possible that on one of these journeys he heard from Bjarne Herjulfson's lips the story of the timbered lands he had seen some fifteen years before. To Leif, with his broad vision, this narrative no doubt was electrifying. The new land would have to be explored; Greenland must have an unfailing timber supply. In the new land, the timber would be free. Theretofore the driftwood they hauled from the ice-fringed coast had been free; but it was not suitable for building boats. Iceland would be an excellent market for timber, too; they could exchange it for tools, farm implements, and farm animals.

GREENLAND was barren of timber for building purposes; the colonists built their barns and houses of stone and turf. Lumber for roofs, floors, panels, doors, furniture, and ships; and timber for fuel was their greatest need. Already they were carrying on a considerable commerce with Norway. The medium of exchange was rope made of walrus hide, eider down, seal skins, and walrus hides; caribou, polar-bear, fox, and wolf skins; wool and cheese. Lumber would make an important addition to this list of exports.

There was another aspect which Leif no doubt considered: A kinsman had discovered Iceland, and his father had discovered and colonized Greenland; he Leif, would round out the family record by discovering and colonizing the new land!

Never lacking in initiative, he forthwith

purchased Bjarne's vessel, obtained as detailed a record as possible of the latter's courses and sailing directions, hired a crew of thirty-five men (among whom, no doubt, were some of Bjarne's earlier crew), and sailed first to Helluland. Then, following Bjarne's course in reversed order, Leif after some days reached the second land, "low-lying and wooded, with stretches of white sand." This he called Markland (forest-land). He then sailed away, before a northeasterly wind, for two days before again sighting land. They came to this (a cape), and sailed around it to the westward. They waited for high tide, and went up a river that flowed out of a lake. Finding conditions to their liking—plenty of fresh water, timber, forest animals, and fish—they built several spacious log cabins, and arranged to spend the winter there. Day and night were more equally divided: On the shortest day of the year, the sun was already up at breakfast time; and had not set when they ate their afternoon meal. There was plenty of fish in the lake, and it seemed to them that cattle could be put out at pasture throughout the entire winter. What a welcome change from Greenland!

Leif named the place Vinland—and about that name there has been much controversy. Did he find wild grapes (and name it after them); or were these an invention of the saga writer? After all, this was not the first Wineland—legendary or otherwise. These writers, who came along 250 or 300 years after an event, were inclined to embroider their sagas; and to confuse their information with the legends and ancient classical notions acquired in reading of Roman and early medieval times.

The other theory is that the name "Vinland" originally meant grass-land or pasture-land, from the Old Norse word "vin" (i.e., pasture), and that it was misinterpreted to mean "land of wine" by a writer who had no knowledge of Old Norse. This would seem to make sense.

Leif made his discovery in the year 1003. There are indications that he planned to settle in the new land. When spring came (1004) he sailed away to Greenland before a favorable wind—but he did not dismantle his buildings, and take the logs with him. This seems to indicate that he planned to return. However, during the following winter his father died, and responsibility for the colony's supervision fell upon Leif. His brother Thorwald volunteered to carry on the family tradition, and Leif turned over to him the vessel and a crew of thirty men.

They arrived in due time at Leif's camp, spent the winter of 1005 there, and in the spring explored the country to the westward. In a fight with Indians, Thorwald was killed. He was buried on the headland which he had chosen for his home. In the spring the crew returned to Greenland, taking along a shipload of seasoned timber.

Meanwhile an old friend of Erik's named Vivilsson, accompanied by his beautiful and intelligent daughter, Gudrid, had arrived from Iceland. Erik gave them a tract of land near his own; within the year Gudrid was married to Leif's other brother, Thorstein.

When the ship returned from Vinland, with the sad news of Thorwald's death, Thorstein made plans to sail to Vinland, bring back his brother's body, and have it interred in consecrated ground in Greenland. He borrowed Leif's vessel, selected a crew of twenty-five men and, accompanied by his bride, set forth. But storms drove them to the eastward past Iceland, and almost to Ireland. It was early in the winter before they were able to beat their way back to the Western Settlement. During the winter Thorstein died; Gudrid became Leif Eriksson's ward.

The following autumn a prosperous merchant seafarer, Thorfin Karlsefni, arrived in Eriksfjord with a large vessel, to be followed soon afterward by another. Both ships carried crews of forty men. All became the guests of Erik, the Master of Brattahlid, for the winter. Gudrid, the beautiful widow, was married to Karlsefni at the end of the Yule season.

Gudrid's father had died during the previous summer, and she had inherited his property—including a ship. This vessel she placed at the disposal of her husband, and it was agreed during the winter that

the three ships would proceed to "Leif's Cabins" at Vinland in the spring, loaded with pioneer settlers and their possessions. The company that finally got under way included less than a dozen women and about 150 men; it was the intention of Karlsefni and Gudrid and most of the others to settle in Vinland permanently. Apparently they were unable to find Leif's log cabins; but they discovered a place where there was good farm land, and plenty of fish and game. Here they spent most of their time during the following three years. Since Leif and Karlsefni were good businessmen, it is quite possible that there was a steady stream of ships, loaded with timber, going to Greenland and Iceland; and bringing back necessities to Vinland.

THIS was the largest and most ambitious of the Norse attempts to colonize the mainland of America. Out of the fantastic saga of the Karlsefnis two significant facts emerge: Gudrid gave birth to a son, the first child of European parents to be born in America; and at the end of three years the small group with weapons little better than those of the Indians, were compelled by the hostility of the natives to return to Greenland.

The exact location of the Karlsefni settlement, Straumsfjord, has never been established. It might have been on Nova Scotia or Cape Breton; on the St. Lawrence River; in the vicinity of Fall River, Mass.; or on Buzzards Bay. The Norsemen kept no log-books; few except clerks and priests could write. But the discovery of North America by the Norsemen can not be disputed. They were a bold and independent people. They were a seafaring people. It was the Norwegians, not the Phoenicians, who first abandoned the shelter and comparative safety of their coast lines, and struck boldly out into the ocean.

They spread themselves along the shores of Europe, making conquests and planting colonies. They subdued a large portion of England, wrested Normandy from the French King, overran a considerable part of Belgium, and made extensive inroads into Spain.

It was the settlement of Iceland by the Norsemen, and the constant voyages between that island and Norway, which led to the discovery of Greenland—and the discovery of America was a natural consequence of the settlement of Greenland. The Norsemen were then, as they are now, excellent navigators. Over the centuries they had developed a clinker-built ship that was to completely transform the geographical ideas of the Tenth Century. The shipbuilding and seamanship of the Norwegians mark a new epoch in the history of navigation and discovery. It is quite likely that they sailed over the entire area between Norway and Greenland, south of the ice-fields, in their hunts for seals and walrus. It would be altogether unreasonable to suppose that a seafaring people like the Norsemen could live for three centuries in Iceland, within a short voyage of the vast North American continent, and never become aware of its existence.

While literary darkness overspread the whole of Europe for many centuries following the Tenth, the art of letters was highly cultivated in Iceland; and this is the very time and place in which the sagas containing a record of the discovery of America originated; there were no wars and conquests and Black Deaths to decimate—and distract the attention of—the Icelanders. It is entirely due to the high intellectual standards and the fine historical taste of the Icelanders that records of these voyages were kept. They served two purposes:

1. To solve for us the mysteries concerning the discovery of America.
2. To show Columbus how he might cross the western ocean and reach this fabulous new land.

This last is a rather startling statement, but it happens to be true.

COLUMBUS was the best geographer and map-maker of his day. He was a man of extraordinary ability; a persevering compiler of all the geographical information he could find. He was firmly convinced of the existence of land beyond

the western ocean; and he based this conviction, as he himself says, on the authority of the learned writers. One of these learned writers was Adam of Bremen. He came to Bremen about 1067, and became director of the cathedral school.

He had access to the archives of the Church; and he was able to collect valuable and interesting information from the reports which priests sent from Norway, Iceland, and Greenland. Adam also spent some time at the King of Denmark's court, where the King and some of the men who had fought in the North talked freely with him about Scandinavia and her people. His work, therefore, (the history of the Church in the North,) is one of the most important sources of Norse history.

The earliest mention of Greenland known in literature is that found in Adam's work. It was written about ninety years after the settlement of the country. He also mentions that emissaries "from Iceland and Greenland" came to the Archbishop at Bremen, and asked him to send priests to them.

It is quite likely that Columbus read the Adam of Bremen volume, which was published in the year 1076; and which gave an accurate and well-authenticated account of Vinland. For in 1477, Columbus not only made a voyage to Iceland and spent some time there, but sailed some 300 miles beyond—which must have brought him almost within sight of Greenland. Is it possible that this man, the keenest student of geography and navigation of his day, could visit Iceland and learn nothing of the discovery of a new land by Leif Eriksson? If he did, it was a serious oversight; for Columbus lived in an age of discovery: England, France, Portugal, Italy, and Spain were vying with each other in discovering new lands.

It is also quite likely that information which he gathered in Rome induced Columbus to make his voyage to Iceland. Rome was the world's center, and all information of importance was sent there. A map of Vinland was in the possession of the Church; and it is quite likely that this map was made available to Columbus. For every new discovery meant, to the Church, an opportunity for extending its influence. The map would explain his firm conviction that land was to be found in the west; also his accurate knowledge of the width of the western ocean. For, it will be recalled, Columbus stated before he left Spain that he expected to find land soon after sailing 700 leagues. A day or two before he came within sight of the new world, he promised his mutinous crew that if he did not discover land within three days, he would turn back.

Columbus may have availed himself of still another source of information: A report of Gudrid Karlsefni's audience with the Pope in the eleventh century. After the death of her husband, Gudrid made a pilgrimage to Rome. She was well received, and she certainly must have told the Pope about the ability of Erik as the colonizer of Greenland; the success of Leif as an explorer; and of the attempt of her husband and herself to colonize Vinland. Greenland had been paying tithes to Rome since the year 1003; the Pope had sent a Bishop there in 1124, and the line of Bishops remained unbroken for more than four hundred years. It is also a matter of record that Erik Upsi was appointed Bishop of Vinland; but the ship on which he sailed from Greenland appears to have been wrecked. Certainly there was no lack of interest in Vinland; and here was a woman who actually had lived there for three years! Is it reasonable to suppose that Columbus, with his passion for research, overlooked the report in the Pope's archives which told of the visit of the remarkable Gudrid to Rome?

TWO of the world's greatest Arctic explorers—Stefansson, in *Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic;* and Nansen, in *In Northern Mists*—devote a considerable portion of their books to the Greenland colonists and what became of them. They ridicule the contention that the Black Death, introduced into Greenland from Norway, so weakened the Europeans in the colony that they fell an easy prey to the Eskimos: What reason have we to think that a plague coming from Europe would pick out only Europeans for victims? The reverse would have been more likely; smallpox and other plagues are

FT. YUKON MOVES

Ft. Yukon is directly on the Arctic Circle, where the Great River makes a sharp bend northward. This old trading-post is the original English-speaking settlement of that region. It was established by the Hudson's Bay Company, more than a hundred years ago. In those days, the Company believed—or shall we say maintained.—that Ft. Yukon, at the confluence of the Porcupine with the Great River, was in British territory. Alaska, at that time, was owned by Russia. Following our purchase of Alaska, Army engineers established the fact that Ft. Yukon was on American soil. Hudson's Bay Company executives, nevertheless, made this flat statement to the United States: "We are here (at Ft. Yukon); we have been here for twenty years; and here we shall stay!"

But the Company was persuaded by a small detachment of U. S. Army troops to move the trading post; in fact, they moved it twice before they finally got into British territory.

SMART GUY

Placer gold that is discovered at the "grass roots" and continues to be present in the gravel all the way to bedrock is a rarity. But it remained for a Fairbanks miner, in recent years, to discover that gold had seeped into the cracks of the bedrock itself. Forty years after the original owner of the creek had taken out the gravel down to bedrock—i.e., had "worked out" the property—this canny individual came along, took up three feet of the bedrock in the channel, "leached" it during the winter, and after six weeks of mining and sluicing operations, was richer by some $30,000 less expenses.

more deadly to natives than they are to whites.

In 1774 an Icelandic missionary, Egill Thorhallason, made a study of the mystery. He considers it unreasonable to suppose that the Eskimos and the Greenland colonists were hostile to each other; and that the Eskimos were the aggressors. That the Eskimos carried on a war of extermination against the Greenlanders, as the world generally believed for hundreds of years, is, in Nansen's opinion, "incredible to anyone who knows the Eskimo temperament and the conditions under which they lived."

The fact remains that in 1341 Bishop Haakon, of Norway, sent a priest, Ivar Bardsson, to Greenland. The Bishop there persuaded him to remain as his steward. About fifteen years later he returned to Norway, and in a report, apparently dictated to a Norwegian and translated into Danish said, among other things: "The Skraelings (puny people; Eskimos) possess the whole Western Settlement. There are horses, goats, cattle, and sheep—all wild; but no people, either Christian or heathen."

This was interpreted to mean that Bardsson found the settlement entirely destroyed by Eskimos; in fact, such is the common belief today. To Stefansson, an ethnologist by profession, this is absurd. As he says: "The Eskimos might have killed the Greenlanders' farm animals for food, without killing the colonists; but they certainly would not have killed the people without slaughtering the cattle." In fact, Stefansson, Nansen, and Thorhallason agree that the colony did not disappear at all, in the sense of being exterminated. What happened, they believe, was that when European commerce declined, for one reason or another, the colonists gradually adopted an Eskimo culture, intermarried with the natives, and disappeared only in the sense that their culture disappeared.

This change may have taken place over a period of a hundred years. Between 1247 and 1261, Greenland voluntarily became subject to the Norwegian crown; before this it had been a free State, like Iceland. Some forty years later, trade with Greenland was declared a royal monopoly. The result was that only the King's ships were permitted to sail to Greenland for purposes of trade. This was the beginning of the end. From two to nine years might elapse between voyages. It is reasonable to suppose that, under such adverse circumstances, with no imports or exports over a period of years, the Greenland settlement disintegrated. Deserted by their mother country, the colonists were forced to hunt and fish for a living; to make summer sealing voyages to the northward; to search the coasts for driftwood; to adopt the Eskimo mode of life. The children of the colonists came to speak the

Eskimo language; and, since the Norsemen were no doubt much inferior in numbers to the natives, they must have by degrees become Eskimo, both physically and mentally. It is also quite certain (as the Bishop of Greenland reported to the Church at Rome) that by this time the Greenlanders had "fallen from the Christian faith." This, however, may also be interpreted to mean that, more and more, the colonists were being absorbed by the Eskimos.

IT may have been that Bardsson arrived at two or three homesteads in the Western Settlement during the hunting season; the "wild" cattle which he saw no doubt had been turned out to pasture, so that the entire family might take the only kind of vacation available in the Greenland colony. Since association with the Eskimos was forbidden by ecclesiastical law, it is not likely that Bardsson knew of these summer forays into the uninhabited regions to the northward; in which case it is quite understandable that he should come to the conclusion that the colonists had been exterminated by the "skraelings."

Another interesting theory is that the Greenlanders emigrated to Vinland; some may have returned to Iceland and Norway. No record is available of any voyage from Greenland to Vinland after the year 1121; but there is mention, more than two hundred years later, of the arrival at Iceland of a ship from Markland, with 17 men on board. However if we hear of this voyage, in the year 1347, only through the vessel being driven off her course, and putting in at Iceland, we may be sure that there were many more voyages like it; and that there were flourishing colonies in Markland and Vinland. The voyages such as the above were not the sort which attracted attention—unless something unusual happened to the vessels.

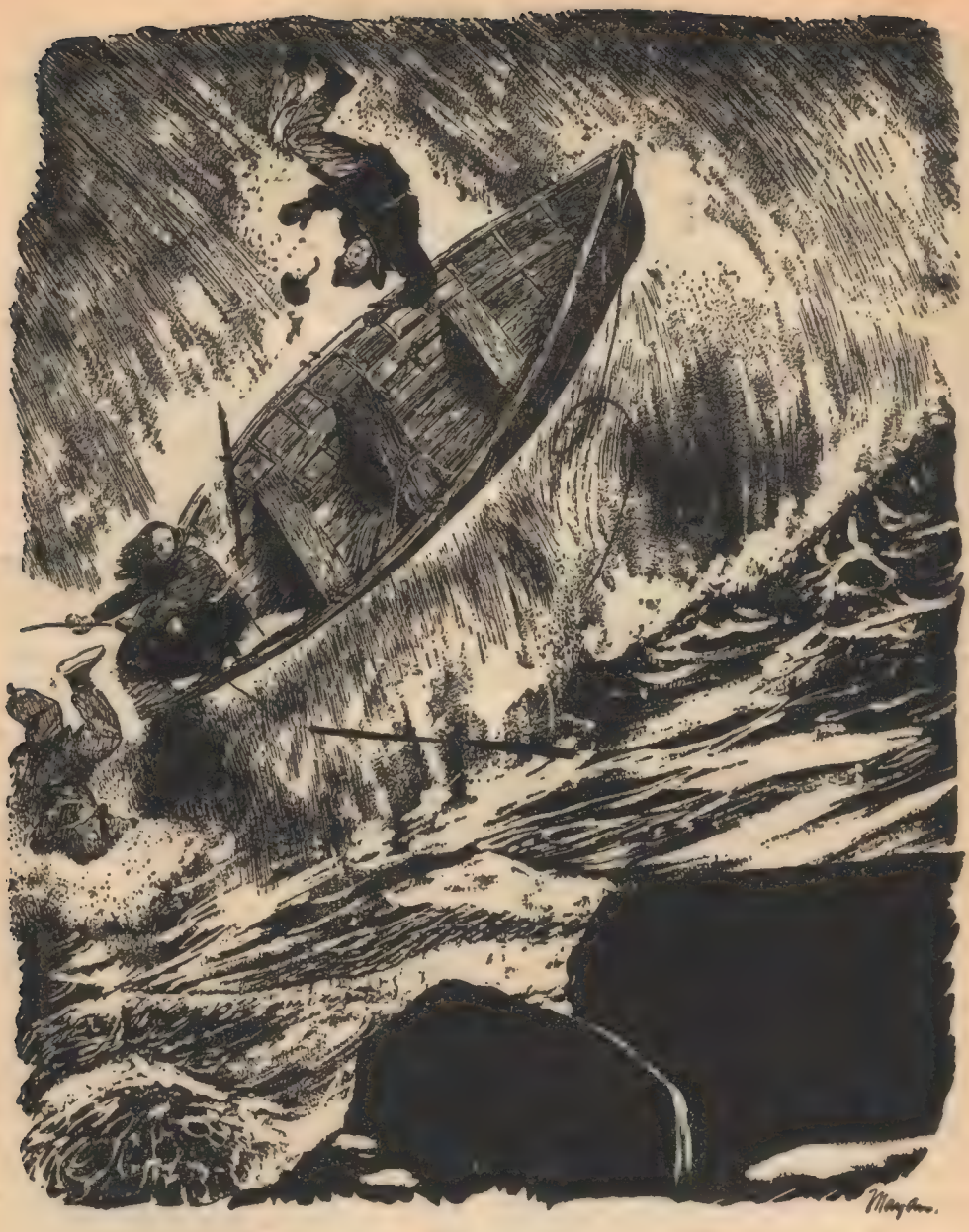
The King of Norway (and Sweden) at that time was Magnus Erikson. King Magnus had spent years of his time and millions of dollars in an attempt to convert his people and others to the Roman Catholic faith. The Greenland ship mentioned above went on to Bergen, Norway, in 1348—and Bergen was then the temporary seat of the Norwegian Government. Their appearance there must have created a great stir; and the Captain may have been summoned before the King for questioning. If so, it must have been disturbing news to learn that his subjects in Greenland were falling away from Christianity. In 1354 the King fitted out an expedition that had a single objective: To bring back these apostates into the Church. The venture had the approval of the Pope at Rome, who authorized the allocation of funds for the purpose.

Arriving at Greenland and, like Bardsson, being unable to locate the colonists, the leader of the expedition naturally would set sail for Vinland. What happened at Vinland is not recorded; but there is evidence, in the "old stone mill" at Newport, R. I., that the expedition made its headquarters there for several years. In the opinion of Hjalmar R. Holand, a historian who has devoted forty years to a study of the Norsemen in America, this structure could not have been used as a mill, but was designed expressly as the central rotunda of a Catholic church of the fourteenth century. This fortified church structure is probably the oldest existing edifice in North America. Mr. Holand believes it was built by the expedition sent out by King Magnus; that it is concrete evidence of the presence of the Norsemen in this country, and that it antedates the voyage of Columbus to the New World by 135 years.

CLIMATE

The low-lying fogs that prevail in the Aleutians during the spring and summer are caused by the chilling of the warm air of the Pacific Ocean by the mountains of the Aleutians and the cold water of the Bering Sea region.

There used to be a widespread belief that the warm waters of the Japan Current were an important factor in modifying the climate of Alaska. Investigation has proved, however, that there is no definite current as far eastward as the Panhandle of Alaska; and that the waters of the current that move eastward toward the mainland of North America are not great enough in volume to modify the climate of southeastern Alaska.



Frost on the Hate

By EDW. A. HERRON

"Deal straight with a pal," is the creed of the North . . . even when the payoff means death.

EVEN when the *Eclipse* shattered on the beach and heeled over with the waves thudding against its sides, young Mark Carson was conscious only of his hate for Grigsby. He held tightly to Della, not so much protecting her as keep-

ing Grigsby away, then, as the glass of the wheelhouse splintered, he hauled himself to his feet.

"Stay here," he shouted. Della nodded, bracing herself against the small chart table. Her jaw muscles were trembling, and her dark eyes were wide with terror. Mark wanted to stay and calm her, but above the wheelhouse he could hear Grigsby working at the lashings of the power boat. He squirmed through the door and pulled himself up the ice-sheeted side of the wheelhouse. Using his fingers as picks, he jimmied the fireaxe from its rest.

"Stand back!" he yelled at Grigsby, and he felt himself grow stronger as though this man who had bested him in everything else had, in this one important moment when life was in the balance, failed. He brought the axe crashing downward and the ropes spread apart like pieces of frozen meat. Inching his way along the roof of the wheelhouse he made ready to deal another blow at the lashings, but at that moment Grigsby leaned down to help Della who was struggling to come up with them. In the jealous fury that beset him, Mark swung wildly at the thick ice-covered strands. The axe struck the copper sheeting on the keel, twisted out of his hand, and went flying overboard. A thunder-making wave struck the wounded *Eclipse,* forcing the fishing boat still further on its side.

"We'll never get those lashings off in time!" Grigsby yelled. He slipped over the side of the wheelhouse, and lifted himself hand over hand along the ice-covered gunwale to the stern where a nine foot skiff bobbed uneasily, sheltered from the onslaught of the waves by the upturned deck. His pocket knife ripped into the thin line, then he was aboard, holding to the bit on the stern and looking back to the two braced on the wheelhouse. "Hurry!"

Mark lifted his hand in assent, mostly because Della was already moving down the side of the wheelhouse. He fought the panic that mounted in him, helping Della along the canted deck, then floundering back inside the wheelhouse for blankets. Into one of them he swept all the cans that had tumbled from the galley cupboards to the deck. He tossed the bundle into the skiff, then leaped himself, reaching his hands to Grigsby who held the oars.

Grigsby paid no notice to the gesture, ramming an oar against the *Eclipse* and shoving outward. A wave, hideous with tumbling green water, picked up the skiff and threw it over the rocks and upon the beach. Della screamed as she tumbled overboard and was sucked backward by the receding wave, and Mark dove in after her.

They stood on the beach, shaking and chattering, looking out to the *Eclipse* almost hidden in the swirl of water. Mark put his arm about Della. "Don't worry," he whispered. "We can always get another boat. Thank God we're still alive."

"We won't be for long if we don't get a move on," Grigsby snapped. He gathered up the blankets, bringing them back to the stand of spruce that crowded down to the beach. He kicked away the snow in a space among the trees, and tossed aside a deadfall of old logs, looking for dry timber.

MARK looked at him almost resentfully, because for a hundred times in the five days since leaving Seattle he had watched Grigsby show superiority in a hundred different ways. Grigsby knew more about gas engines and Diesel engines, more about salmon fishing and halibut fishing, more about navigating, more about cooking—more about women. Then he was ashamed of himself and joined in the search. "Run around," he called to Della. "Keep moving until we get this fire started."

A flame licked up, pale yellow in contrast to the dusty whiteness of the snow, and Mark heaped more and more dried spruce boughs upon it. Behind him Grigsby took the blankets and stretched them between the trees, forming walls on three sides and blocking the freezing wind that came from the Strait. He looked over at Mark as though deliberately baiting him, then reached his hand toward Della and drew her close to the fire. "Carson and I are going down to the beach," he said. "Get your clothes dried as best you can."

"I don't have to go down to the beach,"

Mark snapped. Grigsby shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Then Mark, remembering suddenly that marriage was so very new to Della, kissed her hurriedly and went after Grigsby.

"We're seventeen miles from Hoonah," Grigsby said, "only we're on the wrong side of the Strait. If you'd laid the course the way I told you——"

"The *Eclipse* was mine, and I took her where I wanted."

"Yes, you pig-headed chechako, and you'll drown everybody aboard just to prove your point. If you'd put her on the beach as soon as she fouled her propeller like I wanted you to, we wouldn't be in this mess, and you'd have your boat, too."

Mark was silent.

"That grub you brought ashore will keep us going three, four days, no more," Grigsby continued. "If we can't flag down a boat by then I'll take the skiff and try to get across to Hoonah."

They went back to the shelter. Della had a can of corn opened and bubbling by the fire. "There are nine cans," she said simply. "We'll take one at a time regardless of what's in it."

They ate hungrily with the night closing in swiftly. Afterwards Mark and Grigsby brought in huge armsful of spruce boughs and tramped through the snow for logs that they heaped by the fire. The one blanket toward the sea they kept up, but the others they unlashed, Grigsby taking one while Mark and Della took the other.

"If we live through the night without freezing, it will be a miracle." Della's voice when she spoke, was low and frightened. Mark looked at Grigsby's blanket longingly thinking of the warmth it would bring Della, then his stomach revolted within him, and he drew Della down by his side, covering her with the blanket, trying to shield her body.

Only minutes later the cold crept in like a living thing, starting with faint cool breaths on their ankles and working upward. Huddled in Mark's arms, Della began to shiver spasmodically, then she cried quietly.

Grigsby lifted his head from the spruce bed where he tossed uneasily. He got up and threw more logs upon the fire. Taking his blanket, he spread it upon Mark and Della. He hesitated a moment, then threw himself angrily down by Della's side. The two men glared their hatred of each other, and between them Della was rigid, unmoving. Gradually, as she warmed, she relaxed, and while the two men watched, she fell asleep.

IN the middle of the night a spasm of fear struck Mark like a physical pain, and he slipped from the blankets quietly, floundering through the snow to the skiff where he worked quickly. He went back to the fire, threw more logs upon it, and crept again beside Della.

In the morning, with the storm gone, Grigsby announced that he was taking the skiff and starting across the Strait to Hoonah. "It'll give you two that much more grub to keep you going until I get back with help." He strode down to the beach. They heard him cry out angrily and he came storming back to the fire. "The oarlocks are gone!" He fastened his eyes on Mark. "Did you hide them?"

The younger man said nothing, but walked to a tall, thin spruce where he kicked at the snow about the base. He shook his head, puzzled, then walked to the next tree, digging at the snow. He tried again and again while Della and Grigsby watched. "It was one of these." He looked about helplessly. There were a thousand spruce crowding down to the beach.

"Why did you do it?" Della asked. "Why?"

"I'll tell you why," Grigsby answered bitterly. "He was afraid I'd go away in the middle of the night and take you with me."

Mark sprang to his feet and lashed at Grigsby. The older man laughed and took a step forward, his fists clenched. He parried Mark's blow, then swung viciously. But as he swung, his foot slipped on the ice-crusted snow and he fell heavily. He grunted with pain and bowed his head quickly, pulling his wrist upward to his chest while his other hand nursed it soothingly. Della knelt by his side, sucking in her breath when she saw the jagged edge of bone thrust through the skin above the

wrist. Her silence when she looked up at Mark lashed him worse than any words she could have uttered.

Mark spent that day looking for the lost oarlocks, and when the quest was hopeless he dragged a huge pile of timbers toward the blanket enclosure. All night long Grigsby huddled by the fire, saying the pain in his arm kept him from sleeping. In the darkness they saw the red and green lights of a small boat going along the Strait, but they received no answer to their frantic screams.

In the morning Mark went down to the beach and lashed the oars to the gunwales of the skiff. He went back and stood before Della.

"I'm going across to Hoonah."

Della lifted her head, looking beyond him to the wide stretch of cold water. Her face lighted with hope.

"Will you be strong enough? It's so far!"

"Take her with you," Grigsby called from his post by the fire. "You two'll have just as much chance of getting across alive as if you stay here with me."

"You're coming with us," Mark said flatly. "We'll all three make it, or none of us make it."

"Don't be a fool. If a wind comes up even two'll be bad in that nine-foot toothpick. I'd rather starve than drown. There's always a chance someone'll come along."

"But you can't stay," Della protested. "With your arm—"

"It'll only be twelve hours across," Mark interrupted hastily. "We'll have help back before anything can happen to him. There's plenty of wood ready, and those two cans of beans'll hold him till I get back with a gas boat." He took Della by the arm.

They could see Grigsby rising to his feet, looking down to them, his broken arm cradled before him. Della stepped into the skiff and Mark shoved off. Almost immediately a swell came and licked hungrily at the side-board. Mark stared at it, fascinated, then lifted his eyes to the interminable stretch of water waiting for them. He sat down quickly, and his first strong pull at the oars sent the bow plunging downward and water sloshed in. He tried again, and more water seeped over the side-board. He raised his head and saw Della looking backward to the beach. Lifting the oars inboard, he let the swell ease them back to the sloping sand.

"We can't make it," he said. "Not the two of us." he helped her out, pulling the skiff on the beach, and suddenly drew her to him. "I'll try to get across," he whispered. "And Della, anything I've done—it's because I loved you."

He kissed her, and he was in the skiff again, but after only a few strokes he was back, groping under the seat for the two cans of tomatoes. "I won't need these." Before she could stop him, he was gone. He bent to the oars, watching her standing on the the beach with her hand uplifted in encouragement. She stood there motionless, growing smaller and smaller as he pulled into the Strait. Then, as he watched, she turned and walked back toward the fire and Grigsby. Inside, Mark grew sick.

DELLA'S figure blended with the trees and disappeared while Mark pulled savagely at the oars, his mind rioting, thinking of Grigsby lifting his head and the words he would speak to her. He thought to himself, bitterly, that he would row across to Hoonah and say simply that he had been separated from the *Eclipse* and knew nothing of its fate, and by the time searching parties reached Della and Grigsby they would be dead.

Three hours went by, so Mark judged from the changing leaden colors in the sky. After six hours it was dark and the tiny skiff inched forward. Around midnight a storm came down from Glacier Bay blowing sleet before it, coating the oars and all of his right side that was turned helplessly toward the scraping finger of the storm.

He was soaked with the spray ripped from the blades and coated with sleet, his feet stiff in a cross-locked position before him, his fingers like claws about the wooden oars. Only the ceaseless motion of his body, back and forth, back and forth like a weary pump, kept the blood circulating beneath his frozen outer skin.

Twisting his head he could see the dim

yellow light of the watchman's shed on the cannery pier at Hoonah, yet the storm was blowing with such intensity that he had ceased to move forward, his whole strength directed to the fight against swamping.

The frayed ropes that held the oars parted and he pitched backward. His outstretched left hand felt the bundle of oily rags jammed in the bow of the skiff. After he had forced himself back on the seat and painfully retied the oars in position, he wrapped the rags about his right hand and wrist that were bearing the brunt of the storm.

He thought of Della huddled by the fire back on the beach, her young body tortured by the cold, and the ache in his heart was greater than the pain in his hand and on his cheeks. He knew he could never leave Della and Grigsby to die on the beach.

He would go ashore at Hoonah and send a rescue party across the Strait, but he himself would go away before Della and Grigsby arrived. He pulled at the oars methodically, monotonously.

At three in the morning, fifteen hours on the way, he was still sure he was going to make it, because his sight had dimmed and he did not realize the wind was forcing the skiff relentlessly out to sea.

At five, in the cold light of morning, the motion of the oars was stilled, and the skiff drifted, though he was not conscious of it, thinking he still swayed back and forth as before. He knew that he would not live to cross the Strait, yet he wanted more than ever for Della to live. Laboriously he pulled a notebook from his pocket and with the edges of the small sheet to guide him in the darkness he wrote: *My wife and Fred Grigsby are shipwrecked on Pleasant Island beyond Noon Point.* He worked the note into the corner of his pocket.

He was reluctant to die. He wanted a chance to whisper to Della that jealousy had gone from him forever.

He thought of her again, close by the fire on the beach, the smoke from the wet wood curling upward. His mind reached out for the picture. The smoke from the wet wood. He stared fixedly at the notebook lying by his feet.

One by one he tore the pages from the book and placed them in a dry spot under the narrow stern seat. A match burst into flame on the second attempt, and with an awkward motion he tossed upon it the oily rags he had wrapped around his right hand. The bright yellow tongue ate into the woodwork. The faint warmth made him think again of Della, and even while he was trying painfully to shape his thoughts into coherence, he slumped over to one side.

From the shore the cannery watchman saw the plume of smoke and the drifting skiff. When the gas boat with its chattering exhaust came alongside the skiff, the men lifted Mark, in his stiffened position, inside the cabin. One of them read the note in his pocket and the stubby little craft pointed out across the Strait. Behind them the charred skiff sank beneath the water.

Mark had regained consciousness, but he wasn't able to go on deck when the gas boat heaved-to by the beach at Noon Point and a dory was sent ashore. He waited for the sound of steps on the deck above. Della came first, peering down the companionway, then running to him with a glad cry. Grigsby came behind her, stooping to clear the low opening. He looked at the two of them, Della with her arms tightly about Mark's huddled form, and he touched his sound hand to the younger man's shoulder. "Thanks, Carson. Thanks." He turned quickly and clambered up the companionway, leaving Mark alone with Della.

BIG STUFF

The giant Sitka (Alaska) spruce often towers to a height of more than 200 feet, and sometimes exceeds 14 feet in diameter at the butt. Alaskan cedars, both red and yellow, sometimes attain a height of 200 feet and a diameter of 9 feet at the butt. The Alaskan cedar has a pungent odor, not unlike the sandalwood of Australasia.

WOLF-QUEEN of the GOLDEN AVALANCHE

By JOHN STARR

The stark barrens of the Upper Nesigak was an inescapable trap for any white who dared its dark secrets. But Tom Ballard trekked steadily forward . . . into the jaws of death . . . to uncover the strange fate of Sheila Morrison, hostage of Klunok, the Wolfman.

THERE was a chill threat in the air. Each day the setting sun was curiously ringed with almost imperceptible circles of light—the sun-dogs which, in the northland during the fall and winter, portend a dropping of the temperature, a storm, a severe blizzard. It is nature's way of warning man that the leniency which she has shown him during the summer, with its long hot days and its nights which are not dark but are like softest twilight, is about to end, and that the land is to be given over to the rule of the elements, the cruel northwind, the spectral white death of the blizzard, and the penetrating frost which seeks ever to kill by striking deeply to the heart of all living things.

Winter!

Man is reckless during the Spring and Summer, running his traps and digging his gold. In the Fall, man becomes less foolhardy, and begins to think of the days that lie ahead.

Therefore, when nature paints the sun-dogs on the western sky, man hopes for the best but prepares for the worst. When the sun-dogs blaze, he must hurry his tasks if he is to be finished before winter clamps down.

So there was chill threat in the air. But it was no more chill than the eyes of Klunok, the breed, as he glimpsed beside the creek which fed into the turbulent Nesigak, the bent form of a white man "panning" a gravelbar for gold. Klunok sank down behind a clump of saskatoon, and poked his rifle through the brush, until the gold-beaded foresight, crotched in the rear leaf, stood outlined against the white man's flannel-shirted back. Then Klunok's left eye closed, as he squinted with the right along the barrel; slowly, his right forefinger whitened as it pressed the trigger.

For Klunok, who was under the protection of the Saghalie of the Skies, being murderously insane, had long since vowed that never would the Upper Nesigak be shared with white man or red. Klunok regarded the land as belonging to him alone, a gift from the Almighty. Here he roamed at will, a monarch, owing allegiance to no man. The moose, the bear, the beaver, and others of the wild kindred, were his subjects who acknowledged him as king, and respected his rule of fear. Over them he held the power of life and death.

And the gold in the streams, the precious metal which the white men ever sought—that belonged to Klunok, too. True, he cared nothing for it; the stuff was of less value to him than a handful of dried moose-meat, but he was determined that no white man should carry it away and enjoy it. Because Klunok was a killer who had foresworn the human race, he was forever barred from enjoying such pleasures as man had evolved.

The companionship of other human beings, the white man's whisky and the joyous exhilaration which it brought; the civilized food which he had not tasted in years—these things Klunok craved. Gold would have magically put all his desires within reach had he not been an outlaw. Gold would buy these desired things for white men, which was the reason venturous prospectors sometimes came into the

Upper Nesigak country. But Klunok could not have them, and the gold of his streams would not be used to buy them for white men.

For a second he hesitated, with his trigger-finger taut, so that the slightest increase of pressure would cause the short-barreled carbine to belch flame and death.

THE first man Klunok had killed was an Indian; that was back in the Liard village where Klunok had lived until he had become an outlaw. It was this killing which had sent him into the wilds a hunted man; and by reason of the fact that he was himself a child of nature who could surpass in cunning even the most crafty of the wild creatures, he found himself at home in this rugged wilderness. Nor had the Mounted Police who had been dispatched to find him, once the murder had become known, ever trailed him to his lair. Yet they were persistent, those Mounties, and month after month and year after year, in the season when the Upper Nesigak was accessible, they kept patiently at the task of running him down. But although Klunok might be insane his woodcraft was faultless, and therefore he managed to evade the red-coated upholders of the law.

Since the day he had fled into the wilderness, he had killed other men, mostly prospectors, who, unaware of the savage overlord of the Upper Nesigak, had innocently invaded his territory. Now and then, too, Klunok killed an Indian, for there were many beaver in his domain and their pelts were coveted by the red trappers. These were invariably natives who had ignored the warning signs which Klunok had left along the trails—a grinning skull of a wolf or a wolverine lying there in the path with jaws opened warningly—or perhaps a couple of rude arrows stuck on a bush indicating that whosoever came along the trail must turn back.

Ammunition—his gun was a 30-30, the caliber of weapon most generally in use in the north—was more precious to him than all the gold in the Cassiar. He replenished his stock only when he killed a man and found that the latter's gun was the same caliber as his own. The weapons of his victims he invariably broke across a stone and threw into the river, for he regarded them as bewitched. Therefore, while he shot down with his rifle the human victims who came his way, for hunting game he used a bow and arrow in order to conserve cartridges for his carbine.

He had but one companion, did Klunok, a partly-tame wolf which he had captured when it was a cub by digging out a den and killing the other pups and the mother. The beast served him much as a dog might have done, yet it never barked and never displayed any affection. Nor did it follow Klunok about, as would a dog; instead, it disappeared for hours at a time, and frequently it was gone all night. At dawn, however, Talapus, as Klunok called the wolf, would return, and softly enter the doorless shack.

Likewise, the wolf seemed to have learned that Klunok wanted no strangers in the country, for there were times when it would appear at the shack, go up to Klunok and make a peculiar sound in its throat. By this token, Klunok knew that the wolf had discovered a stranger, and straightway the Indian killer would take the carbine and follow Talapus back to the point where the trespasser had been seen. Thereupon, Klunok would add another nick to the stock of his rifle, by which he kept count of the men he had slain; he would rifle the stranger's outfit, taking only ammunition, however.

After that, Klunok would go on, leaving his victim presumably to the wolf. Passing that way a day or so later, Klunok would observe only a few scattered bones to mark the spot where the murder had been committed. Whether this evidence of a gruesome feast was the work of Talapus or of other wolves, Klunok neither knew nor cared.

So the crazed Indian maintained his evil reign in the upper Nesigak, and steadily white prospectors and Indian trappers disappeared. Nor could the Mounties, search though they did, find clue to the actual whereabouts of the murderer. Now with another victim skillfully stalked, Klunok sighted his carbine and held his breath that his aim might be steadier.

Back in the woods a hundred yards, Talapus, the wolf, waited. He liked not the sound of firearms, and always he preferred to come up after the killing was done.

But although the white prospector down there by the creek was at that moment on the verge of eternity, Klunok did not press the trigger. Almost in the very act of it, he slowly lowered the rifle, an expression of wonder, not unmixed with fear, on his face. For he had just glimpsed three other human beings!

THEY were not more than five hundred yards away, following a trail which led along the creek. Two men—and a woman! All three were white.

One man was a veritable giant. From that distance, Klunok could make out the man's features clearly. They were dark, evil, saturnine, and there was in the attitude of the man something furtive and slinking. The stranger had rested his gun, butt downward on the ground, while he glanced about, as though reconnoitering before going farther down the trail. The second man was more slightly-built. He, too, was armed, and there was about him the same air of furtiveness which marked the big man.

The girl, Klunok observed, was of the type that white men regard as beautiful, although the Indian had his own ideas as to what constituted comeliness. She was fair-skinned, even-featured, and her attitude at this moment was one of despondency. There was a droop to her shoulders, and her cheeks were stained as though she might have been crying. The keen eyes of the Indian revealed all this, details which could not have been picked out by an ordinary man at that distance.

Suddenly the big man in front observed the prospector down beside the creek. With a sweeping gesture he brushed both man and woman back out of sight and himself vanished, although his head reappeared immediately from behind a clump of brush. It was plain that he was puzzled and alarmed by his discovery.

As for Klunok, he had suddenly become worried himself. He could kill any one of these strangers, or the man down by the creek with a single shot. But it would take a little time and craft to kill them all. To shoot the man by the creek would betray his presence to the others hiding up there on the cliff. He debated a moment what was best to do.

Decision came to him, and something like a grim smile twisted his thin lips for a moment. He dare not risk the sound of a gun-shot, but he still had the bow and arrows, which he always carried across his back. One by one he would kill these invaders even as he killed moose. It meant a saving of ammunition, too.

But he would have to work to closer range. Caching his rifle behind the clump of saskatoon, he slipped the bow from off his shoulders, fitted an arrow to it and began creeping forward.

II

AT that precise moment, nearly eighty miles away, Tom Ballard, factor at Liard Post, sat in the stern of his canoe, paddling steadily against the strong current of the river. It was arduous work, and sometimes the current was so strong that he was compelled to go ashore and "line" the canoe upstream. But he did it unthinkingly and uncomplainingly, for Ballard's heart was light with pleasant anticipation.

Up at McLeod, now less than three days distant, Sheila Morrison would be waiting for him. For more than a year now she had been "outside," in the States, and Ballard had not seen her. Now she had come into the northland again, not to leave it until she became his wife. Therefore, the gruelling task of driving the frail shell of his canoe against the surging waters of the swift-flowing Liard seemed as child's play. Once wedded at McLeod Landing, he would take her back to Liard Post, where they had faced danger together and where the foundation of their affection had been laid.

Despite the fact that Ballard looked the part of the veteran Northerner, he had spent scarcely two years in the Cassiar. Coming there to die, as he had been erroneously led to believe, from an insidious ailment, he had not only proved the fal-

lacy of the doctor's theory, but he had hardened in this rugged life until he could hold his own with any man in the Arctic watershed. Cassiar Joe Gautier, that giant who had once ruled the Cassiar, had forced the issue with Ballard, and the latter had come off triumphant.

Gautier's power was broken, the man himself was in prison, and out of it Ballard had not only won Sheila Morrison, but had been given the post of factor at Liard, when he proved that he could handle the savage tribesmen who inhabited the region. Ballard loved the north, as he had loved no other part of the world he had ever seen; he was content to remain here for the rest of his days—providing that he could have Sheila Morrison to share this wild paradise with him.

That she had promised to do, within a year. She had gone "outside," but, true to her word, she was returning now. A letter brought by an Indian from far-off Telegraph Creek, had apprised Ballard of her coming. Straightway, he set out to meet her at McLeod Landing. No gallant of olden days ever went to his wooing with more joyous heart than did Tom Ballard, factor at Liard Post.

Mile after mile, his broad shoulders swung easily to the stroke, and his muscles responded tirelessly. Rounding a bend in the river at last, he caught sight of some thing at the edge of the river-bank which made him pause for a moment. Then, veering his craft abruptly, he drove it ashore, his curiosity aroused.

What he saw was a broken canoe, lodged there among the boulders in an eddy of the stream. It was half-filled with water, and its paddles were gone. The rocks had battered it, but on closer examination, Ballard saw something else. There were bullet-holes in many places in the hull!

He knew then that he was gazing upon the evidence of some tragedy of the northland, where tragedy ever lurks just around the corner. The wrecking of a canoe in the river was by no means an unusual thing, for the Liard is treacherous at best. But under such circumstances, the occupants of the canoe would have repaired the craft and would have gone on.

Here, however, was something more sinister. Bullet-holes meant trouble of a different sort. Involuntarily, Ballard looked around him, but saw nothing except the familiar sweep of the stream, and the ranks of spire-like spruce trees on either bank. He peered more closely at the wrecked craft there among the rocks.

Suddenly his eyes widened a little. At the bottom of the canoe, partly-covered by bits of twigs and other flotsam, was a fragment of blue ribbon!

This puzzled him, but after a moment his mind supplied what seemed to be a logical answer. In the canoe there had been some squaw, doubtless, and to her had belonged this fragment of finery. Ballard had been startled for an instant only because he remembered that blue was the favorite color of Sheila Morrison.

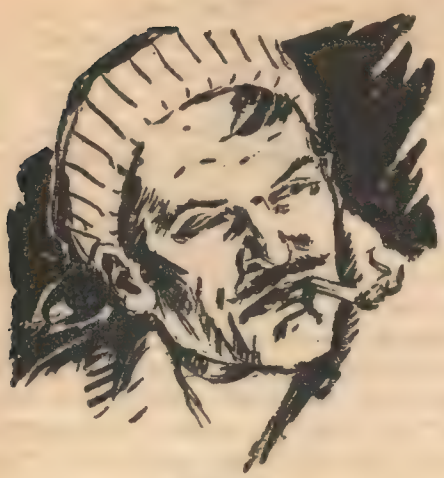
Still, it was unreasonable to suppose that this bit of ribbon had any significance concerning the woman he loved. She was many miles away at this moment, she could not even have reached McLeod Landing as yet. She had written him of the approximate date on which she would leave Telegraph Creek—a date which would make it impossible for her to reach the Landing for at least three days yet.

At last, still puzzled by the find, Ballard pushed his canoe away from shore, and took up the easy swing of his paddle. He resolved that when he reached McLeod Landing he would report his discovery, and after that the Mounted Police might be able to unravel the mystery.

PRESENTLY, the incident was all but forgotten, for Ballard's thoughts centered on Shiela Morrison. He pictured their meeting, and how surprised she would be to learn that he was there before her.

He smiled, and although his eyes were on the river ahead, they did not see it. Instead, there was conjured before them the face and form of Sheila Morrison.

Likewise, Ballard had another surprise for her. A week before he had come across a clue to the existence of a lost mine back in the Liard hills. There could be no question as to the authenticity of his information, he believed. For some time he had observed that Indians who came to



Gautier

the post to trade, had small nuggets. This signified nothing save that the natives had probably found these fragments of gold over a period of years in wandering along the many creeks of the region. They indicated the existence of an occasional "pocket" of the precious metal. And then, one day, an old Indian had come into the post carrying a moose-hide "poke" filled with coarse gold.

Ballard had heard of the old fellow, but never had seen him before. Old Tsumpsit was regarded by other Indians as "queer," and they feared and respected him as being under the protection of the Almighty. Tsumpsit lived many miles back in the hills, a recluse, and such articles as he needed from the post, he had other Indians obtain for him, apparently disliking the idea of associating with white men, even the lone trader at Liard.

But what Tsumpsit had in mind now called for his personal appearance. He needed many things, he explained, for he was growing old, and winter was not far away; indeed, the sun-dogs were already to be seen. Tsumpsit was no longer able to go into the hills to trap or hunt; he must depend upon the white trader for food. Therefore, he had brought this gold, which should buy new blankets and food and other necessities.

Ballard knew that here was no evidence of a mere "pocket" of gold. The nuggets which Tsumpsit had were large, very coarse, and they did not have that worn look which gold acquires after being carried around in a "poke" for years. Ballard surmised that Tsumpsit had discovered the gold very recently.

Ballard weighed the gold, and then indicated various articles which old Tsumpsit could have—a new rifle for, although Tsumpsit was very old and no longer able to hunt game, he still had the wilderness-dweller's pride in a firearm; two pairs of four-point blankets, woolen shirts, and a quantity of food. As always, Ballard treated his customers fairly, giving them the value of whatever articles they offered in trade.

BUT the old Indian was dissatisfied. He argued that his gold was worth much more than Ballard offered. Patiently, the trader insisted that he was giving full value. Still Tsumpsit argued, but Ballard was adamant. A particularly gaudy parka of heavy wool, woven in a pattern of bright plaid, had caught his fancy. He vowed he would not leave the post until he possessed the garment.

Ballard considered. At last he said:

"I have given you full value for your gold, Tsumpsit. But, because you are an old man, and no longer active enough to hunt or trap, I will make you a present of the parka. It will be my gift to you. I shall have to pay for it myself."

Tsumpsit heard these words with surprise. Never, in all his experience, had he heard of such generosity on the part of a white trader. The thing was unbelievable. He regarded Ballard suspiciously a moment, fearing some trick, but when the factor handed over the parka, the old man melted. He clasped Ballard's hand.

"For that, Tsumpsit will make you rich," he told Ballard in the Indian jargon which the young factor at Liard Post had learned to speak fluently. "I will tell you something which I have never told another. I will tell you how you may find gold even as Tsumpsit did!"

Came then a weird tale. For many years, old Tsumpsit had planned on visiting the country of the Upper Nesigak. But he had not done so, for one reason or another. As he grew older, and realization came to him that he was rapidly near-

ing the time when he could do nothing but hug the fire during the cold days, and bask in the sun when the weather was mild, the old craving to see the Upper Nesigak reasserted itself. He resolved to see the land of which he had heard much before it was too late.

True, he realized that there was now an element of danger in the journey. He remembered that several years before, the half-breed, Klunok, who was under the special care of the Almighty, had killed a man and had fled to the country of the Nesigak. It was reported that he slew all men who ventured into his domain.

But Tsumpsit was crafty. When he was young, no one in all this region could match him for woodcraft. He could slip into the dangerous region, look his fill, and slip out again, and Klunok never would discover him.

And he had done so. Nevertheless, he asserted, solemnly, all the while he had been in there, he had a feeling that he was being watched.

SO Tsumpsit had gone into the dread place and had come out again. Also he had found this gold in there, at the foot of a painted-rock cliff. There was much more gold to be had at the foot of the same cliff, but Tsumpsit had not tarried. Still, it would not be difficult for a strong, young man such as Ballard to go in there after it. Nevertheless, he would have to keep a sharp look-out that the crazed Klunok did not discover him.

Old Tsumpsit went out, leaving Ballard thrilled. If gold could be found there in such quantities as Tsumpsit had described, here was a chance to become rich. What a wedding present for Sheila Morrison it would be!

Better still, why should not he and Sheila venture into the Upper Nesigak country together? Spend their honeymoon in there? Together they would seek their fortune—and find it! An inspiration!

Tom Ballard paddled on, lost in rosy dreams. If he had not been a young man who was very much in love, his northern training, comparatively brief though it had been, would have warned him that it never is wise to be self-satisfied in the wilderness. Fate, or Destiny, seems to have a peculiar way of raising one's hopes to a pinnacle, before dashing them to earth.

Yet Ballard was young. He saw the warning sun-dogs in the western sky, but they held no significance for him then.

III

THAT night, in his lonely camp—Ballard lay awake for many hours, complacent as he planned his future. There was a marked coolness in the air, a decided tang which said that winter had already begun its southern advance. Ballard was grateful for the warmth of his eider-down sleeping-bag, as he lay there comfortably smoking, sometimes watching the stars which in the clear air seemed to hang close to earth, and sometimes staring moodily at the fire which seemed to visualize mind-pictures.

Above the insistent muttering of the river, there came to him a long-drawn-out, eerie wail—which he knew to be the howl of a wolf. That, in itself, was a hint of the coming winter, when the gray brethren would gather in packs in order to wage successfully the stern battle for existence during the famine season.

Before dawn he was under way once more, anxious to reach McLeod Landing as quickly as possible; but as the sun rose driving away the night chill, Ballard's spirits rose with it. He swung once more into the steady paddle stroke which had already brought him such a long distance.

Darkness had fallen ere he camped again, and the following day he resumed his journey before sun-up. On the third day he reached the Landing.

The settlement itself was no more than a huddle of cabins on the riverbank, for beyond this point the Liard was unnavigable even to skilled canoemen. From across the range where streams flow westward into the Pacific, a trail led to this side of the Arctic watershed. Going in from Telegraph Creek on the upper Stikine, Sheila Morrison would meet him here, and together they would drop down the Liard until the post where Ballard was factor was reached.

Confidently he drove his canoe ashore,

pulled it up, and, ignoring a swarm of half-starved Indian dogs which almost immediately swept down upon him, struck out for the largest log building, the trading-post, where old MacTavish, the factor, would be holding forth. Ballard knew MacTavish well, for both were employed by the same big fur company. Ballard would, therefore, be glad to see MacTavish again for the old factor had been apprised of the coming of Sheila Morrison and the wedding which had been planned. MacTavish was waiting for him in the doorway of the post.

The old Scot seemed surprised on beholding the young factor from Liard Post. Behind MacTavish in the doorway stood Father Allard, the priest who was to make Ballard and Sheila Morrison man and wife.

"What brings ye here so soon?" asked old MacTavish, when the greetings were over. "And where's Sheila?"

Ballard looked puzzled.

"Sheila?" he repeated. "What do you mean, Mac? She's not due here from Telegraph Creek before tomorrow."

Old MacTavish shook his head.

"Tom," he replied, "ye're wrong. She reached here four days ago, and started down the Liard in a canoe, figuring on reaching the Liard Post before ye left, and surprisin' ye. She left word here for Father Allard, who was delayed, to follow her—plannin' that the weddin' would take place at Liard Post instead of McLeod Landing. Ye mean to say ye haven't seen her?"

Face blanched suddenly as fear clutched his heart, Ballard asked:

"She started down the Liard to meet me?"

MacTavish nodded.

"She did that," the old factor asserted. "She couldn't have missed ye on the river unless she was travelin' by night, which is unlikely. Ye dinna saw trace of her?"

"No trace—" he began, and then stopped as recollection leaped into his mind.

The broken canoe, bullet-riddled!

"WHO went with her?" he demanded. "Who went with her?" he repeated raising his voice.

"'Twas yer Indian friend, Kaska," replied the old Scot. "Kaska came up here from Telegraph Creek, sayin' that he planned to drop in on ye at Liard Post and spend the winter. He had his outfit and canoe ready when Sheila came along. Tickled he was to see her, and when she proposed that they drop down the Liard together to reach the post before ye left, he agreed.

"Tom, what's the matter? Are ye sick?"

Ballard, who had put out his hand weakly, as though to support himself against the door-jamb, shook his head.

"No, no, not sick!" he replied. In that moment his thoughts were chaotic. That broken canoe, the bullet-holes—it could mean but one thing, that disaster in some form had overtaken the woman he loved, and likewise his friend who accompanied her, the faithful Kaska. Exalted by anticipated happiness as he had been, he was now stricken, crushed under the weight of a blow almost too tremendous to conceive. In mute agony he stood there, eyes fixed on MacTavish unseeingly, while his numbed brain sought to come to grips with the situation.

"'Nother bit of news for ye, Tom," went on the old Scot after a moment. "Father Allard, here, bring word that the Cassiar Joe Gautier whom ye beat at his own game when ye first struck this country, has broken jail and with one of his gang, a tough lad by the name af Trayner, has struck into the wilderness. The Mounties have been hard after him, but he got clear at last without leavin' a trail to follow. 'Twould be like him to show up in this country and for that reason we've been keepin' a sharp look-out, but we've seen nothin' of him so far."

Ballard, however, made no reply. It was apparent that at the time MacTavish's words conveyed little or no intelligence to him. Ballard's thoughts were centered on but one thing, that the cruel river, treacherous always, had claimed Sheila Morrison and Kaska after some wilderness desperado, probably a renegade Liard, had fired at their canoe from ambush. Probagly both had been murdered—yet that was too horrifying to believe.

"MacTavish," said Ballard suddenly, lifting his head, "I'm going back, down the river, at once! If the Mounties come here, tell them that I have gone and that they may follow me for I'm going to be hard on the heels of this mystery, whatever it is."

"I found a canoe, MacTavish, which had been wrecked, and which had bullet-holes in it. It may have belonged to Kaska—"

But he did not finish, for the old Scot had seized him by the shoulders and turned him half-around, pointing down river.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Somethin's comin' through the woods there."

Ballard saw a weird, disheveled figure which had appeared at the edge of the clearing less than a quarter of a mile away.

"It's a man!" he said wonderingly. "A man—*why, it's Kaska, himself!*"

IV

KASKA it was that the keen eyes of Tom Ballard had discerned. Slowly he plodded on, his very attitude of weariness indicating that he was near exhaustion. But now Ballard was running toward him, calling out encouragingly, and at the sound of the young factor's voice, the old Indian stopped, stared for an instant and then waved his hand feebly, as a momentary smile lighted his features. Supporting him with a strong arm under his shoulders, Ballard led the old Indian toward the trading-post.

Kaska appeared as one who was dead, yet who still walked. His clothing was in rags, his face was gaunt from starvation, and continually he pressed one hand to his side where the caked blood on his shirt revealed a wound.

"Kaska," cried Ballard, "where is Sheila? What has happened to her?"

But old Kaska shook his head, as though for the moment he could not speak. He sank down at last on a log outside the trading-post, and closed his eyes as though trying to collect his thoughts and the exact words with which to express himself.

"Gone," he said with difficulty. "She gone. *They* take her away!"

Ballard caught him by both shoulders.

"Who took her away?" he demanded in a terrible voice. *"Who took her away, Kaska?"*

The old Indian's eyes smoldered with sudden hatred and anger as recollection flowed back to him.

"Gautier," he replied, and gave the word a sibilant twist, as though pronunciation of it was distasteful to him. "Gautier—and another man; I do not know him.

"They hide behind rocks on river-bank, and shoot at canoe as it go past. I see 'em—Gautier and other man with him. Then they wound me and I fall into river. They think I drown but I get ashore. When I find canoe again, young white squaw is gone. I think maybe Gautier take her.

"Me very sick then, no can follow them. No grub, no gun. Me walk all way to McLeod Landing."

His recital finished, Kaska leaned back against the log wall of the trading-post and closed his eyes. But Father Allard and old MacTavish already were busy preparing hot water and bandages for his wound and broth to restore his depleted strength, for it was apparent that Kaska had been without food for days. Ballard helped them carry him to a bunk in MacTavish's quarters at the rear of the post; and then the young factor came outside and stood staring for a moment at the silent, swift-flowing river which slipped by the little village.

But Ballard did not see the river, although his eyes were fixed upon it. He was gripped by a nameless dread which set his faculties groping blindly for some solution. Almost it seemed that he could see before him the pleading, tearful face of Sheila Morrison, as though she were trying to convey to him a message that she was in dire danger. She was urging him to follow, and rescue her from the brutal giant who had seen the opportunity to strike a telling blow at Ballard, the man she loved, and whom Gautier regarded as his mortal enemy.

That revenge was the motive of Gautier, there could be no question. The extremes Gautier would go to in carrying out that revenge left Ballard appalled and sick at

thought of it. Gautier would not stop until he had put a wound on Ballard's soul which would never heal.

THEN, came a gust of anger as Ballard felt reaction set in. Gautier was determined to hurt him more than the young factor of Liard Post even believed that he could be injured. Gautier had done this, had laid defiling hands upon Ballard's most prized possession—and for that misdeed Gautier would pay with his life!

Foes they had been from the beginning, from the very moment they had laid eyes upon each other. Yet it was Gautier who had forced the issue, kept the flame of hatred burning. Twice they met in physical combat; and the first time the honors had gone to Gautier, who had resorted to a treacherous trick. But later had come the reckoning and the two had fought it out in the wilderness, as man to man, and Ballard had triumphed.

He had triumphed, indeed, to see Gautier not only fairly beaten, but he had likewise given the giant a chance to live when the latter had forefeited his right to existence. Gautier had been taken by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to expiate his crimes. Beaten in fair fight Gautier had been, and Ballard had never a reason to feel a twinge of conscience over the manner of the giant's defeat.

Now, however, free once more, Gautier was striking back at the man who had brought about his downfall. A foul fighter always was this giant renegade, even though nature had endowed him with strength far above that of the ordinary man. But he had overstepped himself this time.

Swiftly, then, yet as though in a dream, Ballard set about his preparations. He neither noticed nor spoke to MacTavish or Father Allard as he went over his outfit, laying in a goodly store of grub, for the chase might be a long one, and Ballard would not stop until he had finished. Yet civilized food was not essential to him; for, like the Indians, he had taught himself to live on red meat alone; and among white and red in that vast wilderness the story of how he had come into the North and for weeks and months survived on a diet of red meat, even as did the natives, while he worked out his own salvation, was widely known.

FROM the shelves of MacTavish he helped himself to plenty of ammunition. Cartridges for his rifle were more of a necessity than was food itself. The hills teemed with game, and if a man ran out of grub he could still survive, providing that he had a gun and could shoot. When all was in readiness, he carried his outfit to his canoe and pushed off with never a word of farewell to Father Allard or MacTavish, for he seemed more like a man who walks in a trance.

Had Kaska not been wounded it is probable that Ballard would have welcomed his companionship, not alone for the fact that he was a staunch ally but because of his consummate woodcraft. Kaska, however, was too weak to travel, and circumstances forbade any delay on Ballard's part. Even then, however, the old Indian protested vigorously and would have risen from his sick-bed and insisted upon accompanying his young white friend, had MacTavish allowed it. Kaska did, however, call out to Ballard that he would follow later. But apparently Ballard did not hear. After all, the feud was between Ballard and Gautier, and the young man asked for no outside help.

So it was that Tom Ballard went shooting down the Liard again, his light canoe all but leaping from the water under the impulse of each surging paddle-stroke. He was accustomed to "making time" rapidly, but never did he travel so rapidly as now. Twisting here and there through the swift current, skilfully avoiding the huge boulders which were ambushed in the flood, cleverly shooting rapids where the river roared and thundered through narrow canyons, Ballard went on.

He had no feeling of fatigue, nor apprehension that he would ever tire or need sleep. In this mood he was a mere machine, driving vindictively toward one objective; and as a machine never tires, neither would he. Deep into the wilderness had plunged Gautier and the latter's henchman, Trayner, taking with them Sheila

Morrison. The odds seemed a thousand to one that in this dry season no one save the most skilful Indian trapper could ever unravel the mystery of Gautier's trail. It might, indeed, be too much for Tom Ballard, determined though he was. But he gave it no thought at this moment; he could not fail and he *would* not fail! The world was not too large nor the way too rough nor too fraught with danger to keep him from overtaking the fleeing outlaw. The Mounties were hunting Gautier, also, but at that moment Ballard ignored the fact; rather he seemed to resent the realization that chance might cheat him of his vengeance through the recapture of Gautier by the men in scarlet-and-gold.

So he went on. Steadily from the bow of the craft a v-shaped wave split away. Nor did his pace slacken throughout the day. Night came, and with it a full moon which generously lighted his way and made it possible for him to avoid the boiling whirlpools and the breaks in the current which indicated the position of jagged-edged boulders, just below the surface. Cool it had been throughout the day, but now the chill was more pronounced; there was a frosty tang in the air. The warning of the sun-dogs had been unmistakable. Before long a blizzard would be raging over the land.

Yet Ballard was not cold, for his blood simmered with that white-hot hatred which only death of a foe can satisfy.

Hour after hour he went on. It seemed that the fates were kind to him, for no disaster in this perilous night-navigation of the river overtook him, although he was doing that which no native, no matter how skilled in handling a canoe, would dare do. Hour after hour, the moon rose higher, swung across the heavens in a great arc, and began at last to sink behind the hills. Ballard went on.

As the moon vanished, the eastern sky lightened with the false dawn. Now the breeze which swept down out of the hills and ruffled the surface of the river, had a biting chill to it, but he gave no heed. Cold and raw came the dawn, with the sun lifting a bleared eye above the horizon.

It was noon when he attained his first objective.

V

As all enterprises must have a beginning, the thing which Ballard had first sought was the broken canoe he had seen on his up-river journey. This was precisely at the same spot as when he first glimpsed it, for it was wedged among rocks from which it could not be dislodged until a freshet lifted the level of the river. From that point on, however, he would have to unravel the mystery himself. It was with mingled emotions, therefore, that he ran his own canoe alongside the wrecked craft at last and examined it.

The bit of blue ribbon again caught his eye, and now he retrieved the thing and held it tenderly between his fingers. It had belonged to Sheila Morrison after all, and not to some squaw! Almost it seemed to Ballard then that she had purposely left it behind as a token for him, a clue to the disaster which had overtaken her. Ballard squeezed the water from it, folded it carefully, and, tucked it into his shirt. Then, grimly, he set about his task.

Had he been more coolly calculating when Kaska had broken the dread news to him, Ballard might have saved himself valuable time and gained much information. But the blow had so dazed him that he could do no more than follow impulse in setting out to run down the enemy who had captured Sheila Morrison. Ballard had first to find out from which side Gautier and Trayner with Sheila had plunged into the wilderness. That having been done, he must strike their trail.

It was, however, comparatively easy to solve the first problem. An examination of the bullet-holes in the stern of the craft showed that the shots had been fired from the left, or north, bank of the river. This tallied exactly with what Ballard had already surmised—that Gautier was striking into the almost impregnable wilderness in the direction of the Arctic. Had Gautier gone southward he would have been more likely to have encountered the pursuing Mounties.

At the point where the canoe of Kaska and Sheila had been ambushed the river could not be forded without a boat; it was impossible for Gautier and Trayner

with their prisoner to cross to the opposite side. Therefore, they had gone north.

But from what point had they started into the wilderness? That had to be determined, now. Clearly, however, it was upstream from where the canoe had been found, for the craft had probably drifted for some distance after being riddled, and Sheila taken from it. Ballard could only determine that act by scouting along the north bank of the river going upstream Pulling his canoe out of the water and caching it in a willow thicket, he shouldered his pack, and, with rifle at ready, started upstream.

As he moved along, his eyes scanned the shore for tracks. There were numerous signs of wild animals but of human imprints there were none. Still Ballard forged on.

He was weary and hungry, but he had no thought of sleep or food. Until he had struck the trail of Gautier there would be no letting down on the nervous tension which gripped him. Like some predatory animal hunting for sign of its prey, he kept up his endless scouting along the north bank of the river.

A mile, two miles he went on, and still there was no sign of where the actual ambuscade had taken place. Apparently the riddled canoe had drifted for some distance in the swift current, after Kaska had fallen from it and Sheila Morrison had been taken out. Still, the distance he had come after finding the craft was great and he became convinced that in some manner he had overlooked the sign for which he was seeking. He was on the point of turning back when he saw something move in the brush less than a hundred yards ahead of him.

HIS first thought was that it might be Gautier, and Ballard flattened down behind a boulder. Then he saw that the thing which had attracted his attention in the brush was a huge bear, a grizzly, which now advanced slowly, head held low to earth while its nose explored the ground for trace of food.

Doubtless this shaggy visitor had come down out of the hills when the berries had vanished, and the number of whistlers or conies which could be dug from beneath their rocky retreats in the hillside, were too few for such an enormous appetite as the great beast possessed. It may have been that the bear had sought the stream with the hope of finding some late run of salmon, whereupon he could gorge himself to repletion before seeking a cave high among the hills where he would spend the winter in dreamless sleep.

Grizzlies have poor eyesight at best although their sense of hearing and smell is almost uncanny, and at that distance with the wind blowing from the bear toward him, Ballard was convinced that he was not seen by the huge plantigrade. So he lay behind the rock, watching the bear out of curiosity and wondering what the beast would do.

Ballard had no fear of the bear. He had learned to use a rifle since coming into the north, and he was confident that he could stop the beast with ease if the latter suddenly winded him and decided to charge. In any event a charge would be most unusual unless the bear was wounded. Nor was Ballard tempted to kill the beast wantonly. As food, the grizzly would be hardly palatable, and, anyway, Ballard had plenty of grub. Later he was to bless the fact that he withheld his fire, instead of deliberately shooting down the bear, which was unconsciously blocking the man's way.

For, as the great beast worked nearer the water, quartering the ground among the boulders which lined the shore of the Liard, Ballard saw the grizzly pause suddenly and sniff long and earnestly as it discovered something of extraordinary interest. Even as Ballard watched, he saw the beast undergo a change.

The long, shaggy hair about its shoulders and neck and along its spine, half erected warningly, while a deep growl rumbled in its throat. Then the bear raised its head and with nose pointed upward, sampled the air in every direction as though seeking an answer to some puzzling question. It growled again, and sniffed at something lying on the ground. Then, after a moment, the beast moved stiffly and with vast dignity away toward the woods.

Ballard's first impression was that in some manner the bear had winded him as he lay there behind the rocks, but he knew that this was scarcely so for the wind was blowing in the wrong direction for it. With the bear gone, he got up presently and went forward with curiosity to find out what it was that had so apparently aroused anger in the beast. Between the rocks where the bear had stood he found the answer to the problem.

Three empty rifle cartridges lay there! They were of 30-30 caliber, Ballard saw; and the position of them proved that they had been fired by some rifleman half-hidden behind one of the rocks. Bending over, Ballard studied the ground, but at that point the earth was hard-packed clay and gravel which would take no footprints.

Still, he realized that he had made a real discovery; that he had obtained a clue to the thing which he sought. These empty shells had come from the gun of Gautier or Trayner and it was out there in the stream that the canoe of Kaska and Sheila had been when the outlaws had opened fire. On this hard ground and with the shells lying in the lee of the rock, Ballard realized that there had not been more than one chance in a thousand of his discovering the clue, had it not been for the infallible nose of the grizzly which had readily detected this evidence of man.

The man felt a rush of gratitude that he had not killed the bear upon first seeing it.

The next move, however, was to pick up the trail of Gautier and Trayner. With this clue which fixed the location of the ambuscade, the succeeding step should not prove difficult. Striking back farther from shore, where the ground was soft and mucky from springs which seeped down out of the side hills, Ballard began looking for tracks. And not far below the point where the empty shells had been located, he saw the signs which he had sought—the imprints of moccasined feet, the size of which indicated unmistakably that the tracks had been made by Gautier himself! There were other tracks, too—the imprints made by another man, and smaller marks left by the more dainty boots of Sheila Morrison herself!

BALLARD felt a sudden thrill of exaltation sweep over him. He was on the trail at last! True, he still had the problem of following it through the woods, but he believed that he was enough of a frontiersman to do this. Nor did it appear to be difficult in the soft ground. While the moccasins worn by the two men made little or no impression on the thick carpet of leaves which covered the ground, the heels of Sheila Morrison left well-marked indentations. Ballard set off like a wolf on the trail of game.

He held to it with uncanny skill. Leaves pressed down here, a mark of Sheila's boots, a bent twig, and once he found a small branch which had been broken. Something told him that this was the work of Sheila herself, as though she were trying to leave a clue behind for him to follow. But he doubted if she could keep it up, for her acts would not go long unnoticed by Gautier or Trayner. He trembled at the thought of what the two men, angered, might do if they discovered that she was deliberately blazing a trail which could be followed by rescuers. On and on Ballard went, across one side of the great valley of the Liard and climbed a long slope, still sticking to the trail. At the top of the ridge he came out at last, and paused here to look ahead of him.

To front and to right and left as far as he could see, rose the jagged sawtooth summits of a mighty mountain range. The trail led straight toward it, and Ballard guessed that the fleeing Gautier, with Trayner and Sheila, had crossed over to the other side.

But what lay over there? What manner of country was it? A strange land to Ballard, certainly, and he glanced around to establish his compass points and endeavor to fix the location of the country in his mind.

Suddenly he started, as realization came to him. Beyond that range must be the region of the Upper Nesigak! The region which he with his bride would have explored in search of the lost mine of old Tsumpsit. The region, indeed, where ranged that storied killer, Klunok, so thor-

oughly feared that few men save detachments of the Mounted Police ever penetrated the place.

This was the region, then, to which Sheila Morrison had been taken! As though not exposed to enough dangers at the hands of Gautier and Trayner, she would be forced to undergo the peril of invading the domain of Klunok, the crazed Indian killer—Klunok, who guarded his gold-bearing streams from the encroachment of all men. New fear clutched at the heart of Ballard as this aspect of the situation dawned upon him.

He had no fear for himself; there was no doubt in his mind but that he could take care of himself even though pitted against Gautier, Trayner and the wily slayer of the Upper Nesigak. But Sheila Morrison was in there at their mercy and Ballard's soul turned sick at realization of it.

Nevertheless, he would go on. True, he might not come out again, but that seemed to be of small consequence now. He would have his reckoning with Gautier and Trayner, and the crazed Klunok would not stand in his way, either. The lost gold mine of old Tsumpsit was something remote from Ballard's mind at that moment.

FOR the first time, however, his hot anger, having changed from blind, impulsive action into more coldly studied yet determined efforts, Ballard bethought himself that he was not only weary but hungry. He put down his pack, got out food and ate it ravenously, without pausing long enough to build a fire. Then, unlashing his sleeping-bag, he spread it on the needle-carpeted ground in a spruce thicket. Ere he closed his eyes, however, he observed the sun about to vanish behind the western hills.

He marked the great sun-dogs about the orb. The sight of them gave him a feeling of uneasiness. A storm was at hand, and he realized that a blizzard just now would mean the end of all his hopes. It would mean that not only would the trail of Gautier be covered, but the mountain passes would be blocked until the following spring.

In the depths of the frozen wilderness the woman whom he loved would remain the helpless captive of two murderous outlaws and an equally murderous, insane Indian. The dreadful picture was almost too much for Ballard to contemplate, and he put the thought from him while he resolved to sleep for a couple of hours, and thus refreshed, press on at greater speed than ever.

In the western sky blazed the sun-dog's warning of approaching winter. Seemingly, then, there remained for Ballard but a few days—before he must accomplish the tremendous task to which he had dedicated himself. Not only must he match his wits and strength against murderous outlaws, but he must also overcome the element of time and the threatening forces of nature in her bitterest mood.

The sun-dogs blazed on, while Ballard slept, to awaken presently to the realization that he must answer a challenge more terrible than he had dreamed.

VI

ON that day beside the creek which emptied into the Upper Nesigak, Jim Morrison, industriously panning a gravel-bar, had paused in his labors as there came to him a premonition, a feeling of personal danger, which was imminent and pressing. It seemed to him that malevolent eyes were boring into the back of his skull, and quickly he glanced around, but saw nothing. Half convinced that it was merely a case of his nerves playing him tricks he went back to his work.

But at the same time that feeling of uneasiness persisted. For that matter, Morrison had been more or less uneasy ever since he had ventured into the region of the Upper Nesigak. He had known full well that he was taking his life in his hands when he did so, but hope of reward was great enough to compensate for the ever-present threat of danger.

Morrison, young, and with real ambition awakened in him for the first time, wanted to make good in this Northland. He wanted to show his sister, Sheila, and also Tom Ballard, who was to be Morrison's brother-in-law, that he could suc-

ceed as well as other men. In the beginning, Morrison had made mistakes which he was now endeavoring to rectify. He had cast his lot with Cassiar Joe Gautier when that giant renegade was posing as champion of all free-traders who were fighting the great fur company. But in the end, Morrison had had his eyes opened to the true purpose behind Gautier's efforts to keep the Liard Indians in a state of rebellion; and the young man had broken with Gautier.

Then had come the historic clash between Gautier and Tom Ballard, with the latter triumphing and Gautier landing within the toils of the Mounted Police. Since that day, nearly two years ago, Ballard and Morrison had been very good friends. Indeed, Ballard had come to take on the aspect of a sort of demi-god in the eyes of Sheila's young brother. Ballard's strength and unswerving courage were qualities which the boyish Jim could admire.

So Morrison became ambitious to do something on his own behalf, something fully as daring as that which Ballard had accomplished. When Morrison heard the stories of gold to be found in the Upper Nesigak and of the crazed Indian, Klunok, whom the Mounted Police could not catch, and who killed so swiftly and silently that other white prospectors feared to enter the country, the young man's imagination was fired. He wanted to do something which other men were afraid to do. Therefore, gathering himself a light outfit, and leaving no word of where he was going, he struck out for the region where gold had beckoned many to their doom.

FOR several days he roamed the region without seeing signs of Klunok or of any other man. He began to think that the stories of the Indian killer were at least greatly exaggerated if not downright lies. More, confidently, then, and with less precaution than he had taken at the beginning, he explored the country, panning the various creeks, until at last he had found one where every scoopful of black sand revealed small nuggets.

Morrison was not only elated but he was tremendously excited, for he was convinced that he had made a really great "strike." He resolved to pan out as much gold as he could in three or four days and then make for the nearest post to spread the good news. He was certain then that a stampede would follow, and, wealthy beyond his wildest dreams, he would be hailed as the discoverer of a second Klondike. Even Ballard would be compelled to regard him with a new respect, and certainly he would be a hero in the eyes of his sister.

Soon after he had begun panning the creek, he had discovered a wolf standing at the summit of a nearby hill, watching him curiously. Morrison's first impulse was to shoot the gray marauder, but he decided that this would be unwise, for the sound of the gun might attract the attention of Klunok himself. So he went about his work, and when he looked again at the hill the wolf was gone.

Strangely enough, too, with the disappearance of the wolf had vanished Morrison's feeling of uneasiness. But that feeling came back again, perhaps two hours later. Once more he was certain that somebody or something was watching him. He looked all about but could see nothing save the gray and brown rocks, the sombre spruce trees and an occasional clump of saskatoon and willow. Half-convinced, at last, that he was merely undergoing an attack of "nerves," he continued industriously panning the gravel-bar, until a movement at the top of a rather high point on the opposite side of the creek attracted his attention.

He looked up in time to see a man vanish beyond a clump of brush. Morrison was not aware, of course, that just previously Gautier and Trayner, and also Sheila, had stood out there in plain sight. The distance was, however, too great for any of them to have recognized him; he seemed to be merely a prospector; while Morrison never dreamed that the man he saw vanishing behind the brush was Gautier, and that Sheila was there, too.

Yet the discovery galvanized him into action. Jumping to his feet and casting aside the gold pan, although the nuggets he had panned were safely within a moose-

hide "poke" in his pocket, Morrison caught up his gun and dashed for the nearest covert. As he took a step, however, there was a sharp, whistling sound and an arrow shot through the air over the exact place where he had been standing. Had he not moved he would have been transfixed.

But there was no time to hesitate. As he ran forward and flung himself behind a great windfall another arrow whizzed by within two inches of his head.

THE thing was a puzzle to him. His first impression, when he had seen the figure of Gautier on the opposite bank, had been, of course, that it was the Indian, Klunok, who was stalking him. But these arrows came from another direction. Therefore, Klunok was on the same side of the stream as himself, and the man he had seen over there on the point was a stranger. But who? That it was Gautier, was the last thing which would have occurred to Morrison. If it were not Klunok, then it must be a white man, who, undoubtedly, would prove an ally and a friend in combating this crazed native killer.

No more arrows came, yet Morrison still had a feeling that he was being watched. The woods, however, were silent as ever, and the only sound which broke the stillness was the lazy murmuring of the nearby creek. He poked his rifle through the branches of the windfall and waited, listening.

Presently the strain of it began to wear on his nerves. He was convinced now that Klunok had actually seen him and was creeping forward like some hunting cat about to leap upon its prey. So consummate was the woodcraft of the crazed Indian that Morrison heard no sound of the stalker's approach; there was no breaking of a twig or rustle of a leaf, and of Klunok the white man could see nothing. Something, however, told Morrison that the Indian was coming closer, closer, striving for a better shot.

The boy was not without courage and, given the opportunity, he would have shot it out then and there; but the strain of waiting, waiting for something, he knew not what, was too much to bear. He knew that he would be shot down without mercy, perhaps without even glimpsing his slayer. Morrison decided to take matters into his own hands. Still keeping the windfall between himself and the point from which the arrows had come, he began backing away as rapidly as possible.

He sought to keep under cover as much as he could, yet all the while he was working toward the creek with the hope of crossing it and joining forces with the man whom he had seen on the other side. Between that unknown and Klunok, he preferred to risk his chances with the former. Undoubtedly, the stranger was as anxious to evade Klunok as he was himself. Together they might be able to hold off the Indian. So Morrison went on.

And in his progress toward the creek, he was favored largely by luck. Klunok knew that Morrison was armed and he knew, too, that the man was aroused. Therefore, Klunok did not dare expose himself. Likewise, Klunok realized that the man across the creek might open fire. So he combined the most stealthy craft in his advance toward the windfall where Morrison was supposedly hidden.

Klunok reached it at last, only to discover that his intended prey was already down by the creek. Indeed, Morrison, appearing suddenly from behind a rock, plunged into the stream and began floundering as rapidly as possible for the opposite shore.

It was too long a bow shot for Klunok, and with an exclamation of disgust he put down the bow and arrow and picked up his rifle. But Morrison was now a hundred and fifty yards away, zigzagging wildly through the foaming waters of the creek. Klunok's first bullet sent spray in Morrison's face, and the second ripped through the young man's shirt, but without wounding him. Before Klunok could shoot again Morrison had gained the shore and was once more under cover.

Hidden in the brush, the insane Indian went into a paroxysm of rage and disappointment. Fifty or sixty feet behind him Talapus, the wolf, watched the antics of its master with curiosity. Klunok brandished his gun, and invoked the wrath

of the Saghalie of the Skies upon the man who had escaped him; he mouthed horrible expletives and was seized with an epileptic fit which left him frothing. But directly this outburst passed, and once more he became the cunning, skulking killer. Backing out from behind the bush wherein he had been lying, he ran swiftly for a point where he knew that the stream could be forded easily. He would gain the opposite side and, one by one, he would shoot down these whites who had invaded his territory.

On the opposite side of the creek, still keeping under cover, Jim Morrison made his way swiftly toward the point of land where he had last seen the strange man whom he had at first believed to be Klunok. Morrison was worried, uneasy and desired nothing so much now as to get out of this infernal region haunted by a skulking assassin. He welcomed the opportunity to join forces with the stranger, and told himself that, no matter who the man might be, he could scarcely fail to be an ally in the common warfare to be carried against the crazed Indian.

Convinced at last that he was fairly well out of range of Klunok's gun, Morrison finally broke and charged up the steep gravel-slide, toward the point where he had last seen the stranger. He reached it, drew himself panting over the rim, raced for the nearest clump of brush, and flung himself out of sight. He was still lying there almost breathless from the terrific exertion of running up the face of the gravel slide, when he heard a rustle in the brush close by him, and he looked up.

Standing there with his rifle covering him was Cassiar Joe Gautier, while behind the giant was another man, also armed. Then, there was a half-choked cry as Sheila Morrison ran forward to fling herself in her brother's arms!

VII

"JIM!" cried Sheila. "Jim! How did you ever get here?"

Young Morrison was too dazed to reply readily. He stared at her—then at the grinning, leering face of the towering Gautier, and at Trayner. Gautier, who was presumably miles away in jail, here with Sheila! The thing was incredible, unbelievable. But Sheila, evidently knowing the questions which were racing through his mind, answered them.

"This beast," she cried, pointing to Gautier, "shot poor Kaska and took me prisoner! He knows that Tom Ballard will follow, and then he'll kill Tom. But you, Jim—"

Gautier broke in with a triumphant chuckle:

"We are well met again, *mon ami!* You desert me for that pig-dog, Ballard, eh? You theenk old Cassiar Joe live forever in prison, eh? But prison no hold him. I come back to keel Ballard.

"But you, *mon ami*; I did not expect to find you here. What should I do with you? Perhaps, give you over to that crazee Indian, eh?"

Morrison did not answer at first, but he gave back boldly stare for stare with the giant who stood over him. Then Morrison got to his feet.

"I used to call you my friend, Gautier," he said after a moment, "but that was before I knew what kind of a man you are. Now you have kidnapped my sister, laid hands on her. For that, I'm going to kill you—"

He broke off to catch up his rifle, and sought to level the gun, but ere he could do so Gautier moved with the swiftness of a striking rattlesnake. True, the big man could have shot down Morrison with ease, but he chose another method. Despite his bulk, Gautier had the litheness of a panther. He struck down Morrison's gun before it could be fired; one strong hand wrenched it from the young man's grip, while a back-hand stroke flattened him. Crying out, Sheila would have flung herself at Gautier had not Trayner seized her quickly. Gautier stood there, still smiling his supercilious smile, while he gazed at her in triumph.

"Hear me, *mon ami,*" remarked Gautier to Morrison, now struggling to his feet. "you try that again and I keel you!" Still Morrison would have taken up the gage of battle had not Sheila stopped him.

"Don't Jim," she begged. "He'll only

do as he says."

But Morrison, fighting angry, would have ignored her. Gautier broke in:

"Be warned, *mon ami!* Your sister, she is ver' wise. I like dat girl—I like her the first time I see her. If you do not try to keel me, maybe I let you live?" He smiled again.

"I think that by and by dat crazee Indian come here to keel all of us," went on Gautier. "When I look down by the creek and see you there, *mon ami,* I no believe it is you. But dat Indian see you, too.

"I tell you funny thing, *mon ami.* I know dat Indian, Klunok. Long time ago when he is leetle boy, I see him at Liard village, and he tell me some day he grow up to be big like me. Dat is before he go crazee, and keel men. Klunok he come here soon and maybe try to keel us because he not know who I am. But I show dat Klunok dat I am better woodsman than he is. You wait here and see!"

Trayner was given Morrison's gun. Under other circumstances the weapon might have been broken and thrown away, but evidently Gautier was not averse to keeping all the firearms possible at this time. He gave Trayner a few instructions in an undertone so that neither Sheila nor Morrison caught the import of the words. Then Gautier vanished into the woods.

At Trayner's gruff command, Sheila and her brother were compelled to drop back out of sight in the brush. Alone he stood guard, but Morrison observed that the man kept a tree between himself and the direction up-river from which Klunok would likely approach. Of Gautier they saw nothing; the woods had swallowed him silently.

CONJECTURES raced through young Morrison's mind. Where had Gautier gone, and what did he propose to do? The actions of Trayner indicated that the outlaw companion of Gautier feared the approach of Klunok. At any instant a bullet or an arrow might come from the woods, and one of them would die. The minutes dragged on and still there was no sign of Gautier.

Suddenly from near at hand there was the slightest crackle of brush, and Trayner whirled nervously, half-throwing his rifle to his shoulder. But he lowered it again quickly, and a relieved smile showed on his face. Looking up, both Sheila and her brother involuntarily gasped.

For, standing less than twenty feet away, was Gautier himself, still triumphant as he leered down at them. And beside him was the most horrible-looking human being either of them had ever seen—Klunok himself!

In his hands the Indian grasped a short-barreled carbine, while over his left shoulder was swung a bow and a moose-bag quiver filled with arrows. He was short, squatty, indescribably dirty, and clad only in the untanned skins of wild animals. His matted hair streamed down over eyes which shone with a maniacal glare. But here was the astonishing thing; he seemed to be almost subservient to Gautier, as though, indeed, he were under the control of the giant!

Gautier's leering smile broadened.

"You are surprised, eh," he asked. "You wonder how I can bring in Klunok when even the Mounted Police cannot find heem. It is because he remember me for long time and because I am a better woodsman as he is, I stalk him even as he stalks us, and when he would shoot me, I stop him. He remember me and I show him that I am now his friend. Klunok, he is crazee, but not so crazee as he might be. Cassiar Joe handled him. *Magnifique,* eh, *mon ami!*" he concluded, addressing Morrison.

SHEILA and Morrison said nothing. The sight of Klunok was enough to make the flesh of an ordinary person crawl. He was loathsome, revolting, and he suggested the venomous deadliness of a pit viper. His glaring eyes shone with hatred and suspicion as he regarded Morrison and the girl, although he seemed to pay no attention to Trayner. Suddenly Gautier began to speak in the Liard jargon.

"It is as you see, Klunok," he remarked, as though resuming a previous conversation with the crazed Indian. "They are

our prisoners.

"I could have killed you, Klunok, back there in the woods, for I am as great a hunter as you are. Or I could disarm you and give you to the Mounted Police. But I shall do neither, Klunok, for I want your help as you will want mine.

"We do not come to take your country away from you, Klunok, nor to help other white men do it. We will live here in peace with you, and we will help you keep others out of it. We, too, are at war with the Mounted Police.

"Soon there will come one other, *but he will be your enemy!* He will try to rescue this white squaw, here, and the other prisoner, who is her brother. But we shall kill him, Klunok, and then we will live together here happily in the wilderness. You shall be a king over us!"

The eyes of the Indian glittered appreciatively at this recital; it was apparent, too, that his hatred of Morrison was great. He had discovered the young man prospecting a stream and had tried to kill him, but had failed. At the same time it was apparent that Klunok was under the direct control of Gautier himself. The Indian grunted, nodded his head; it was plain that he understood.

Gautier turned to Sheila Morrison with a smile.

"You see, ma'mselle, what I can accomplish, me, Cassiar Joe Gautier," he told her proudly. "I have control this crazee Indian. For the time being he will not hurt you or your brother; but if you try to escape he will track you down. You understand, ma'mselle?"

Sheila did not reply. Yet she understood; indeed, she had understood everything which Gautier had said to Klunok, for the Liard tongue had become more or less familiar to her during the time she had spent in the north. Jim Morrison understood, too, but he likewise, made no comment.

"Klunok, here," went on Gautier triumphantly, "is hereafter one of us. You call me devil, ma'mselle; now you see that the devil has an ally, this crazee Indian!" Gautier laughed, his great frame shaking with mirth.

Then with a word to Trayner and Klunok, the big man turned and led the way into the forest, deeper into the forbidding wilderness of the Upper Nesigak. Because it was futile at that moment to struggle or rebel, Sheila and her brother followed him. Just behind them came Trayner carrying the two rifles—his own and that of Morrison. Klunok vanished in the woods, on some mission which he alone understood, but not without one more murderous look at the two prisoners.

From a nearby knoll, a wolf howled as though in disappointment. Talapus was hungry.

VIII

FROM two hours of profound slumber, Tom Ballard awoke to find darkness upon the land and a chill wind blowing over the slope where he lay. The atmosphere had turned colder, and as he sat up he felt an occasional snowflake strike his cheek.

Yet this fact would not necessarily mean that a storm was due at this time. The first threat of snow might die away and the storm be delayed for days; still, by daylight it might be snowing heavily. No matter what the outcome, however, he realized that time was pressing. Hurriedly he got out of his sleeping-bag, rolled it in a neat bundle, and then ate another snack of lunch.

It was impossible for him, of course, to follow the trail of Gautier and the others during the darkness. But he had already considered that aspect of the situation and had determined upon a plan.

That Gautier had crossed the range of mountains just ahead there could be no question. The outlaw was striking into the region of the Upper Nesigak because that wilderness was remote and inaccessible. Ballard could only go on, holding as best he could to the general direction which Gautier had taken, and relying on the hope of picking up the trail of the outlaw when daylight came. For hours were precious and Ballard was compelled to make the most of them; he would sleep only as much as was absolutely necessary and would press on even during the night. Sooner or later he was confident that he

would pick up Gautier's trail once more; and then with the chase suddenly grown hot Ballard would stick closely to the route taken by the outlaw.

It was dark, for the sky was murky and there were no stars or moon. By intuition, rather than by sight, Ballard went on, groping his way through the gloom-filled woods. He discovered, however, that he was following a well-rutted moose-trail, an ancient highway of the antlered clan, leading in the direction he wished to go. Chances were that Gautier had taken the same trail. No human being knows a rough country better than does a moose and these paths through the forest, in use for many years, are relied upon infallibly by northern travelers.

Ballard surmised that this particular trail was used by moose out of the river-valley and back to the heights where forage was better in the late season, and where on the high slopes and knolls the great bulls would battle for their mates during their love-moon. No doubt, this particular moose-trail led through some high pass over into the region of the Upper Nesigak. It was comparatively easy to follow in spite of the darkness, and Ballard made good time.

Nevertheless, there was a strong element of danger in this forced march during the night through the woods. Moose had blazed the trail and relied upon it now, but it was also used by other wild creatures. Grizzly bears were fond of following these same trails, for it gave them easy going through the brush. There was a chance, therefore, that Ballard might come face to face with one of the great plantigrades, prowling the forest by night.

But grimly determined as Ballard was, he reckoned not the odds against him; he would keep pressing on although a hundred grizzlies barred his way. Gautier would expect that Ballard would camp during the night and the very fact that Ballard was doing no such thing might easily result in the upsetting of the outlaw's calculations.

HOUR after hour Ballard pressed on, gun in his right hand, while with his left he shielded his eyes from branches overhanging the trail. Instinctively his feet held to the well-beaten path, although he could see nothing. It was well past midnight when he came out into a little natural clearing, high up on a great hog-back, and paused there for a brief rest and to take stock of the situation.

The sky was still overcast but Ballard observed with satisfaction that it was no longer spitting snow. The blizzard was holding off after that first threat. It might be days now before the storm struck, despite the warning of the blazing sun-dogs.

The night was now very still, the wind having died away, and Ballard stood there listening to the faint night sounds of the forest and wondering how Sheila was faring at this moment. Gautier had gone steadily onward, and he must be many miles away at this moment. There was a chance, however, that Gautier, surmising that Ballard would follow him quickly, would pause long enough to arrange an ambush.

But Ballard did not believe that this would be done until the outlaw had tolled him well into that wild, almost inaccessible region for which he was heading. Ballard's anger, so hot and impulsive once, had now become a cold, merciless part of his nature—a determination which would drive him on until he had overtaken his enemy. Fate might decide that the meeting between Gautier and Ballard would be too late to save Sheila, but vengeance would be exacted just the same.

Strangely enough, too, Ballard's thoughts turned to Jim Morrison. He wondered where Sheila's brother was at this moment. For months he had not heard of him. That last word that Ballard had had was that young Morrison was prospecting in the region about McLeod Landing. Ballard had become genuinely fond of the boy and had rathered admired the way in which the young man was rapidly becoming a seasoned northerner.

At the beginning, Morrison had cast his lot with Gautier, but this was before he knew what manner of man the outlaw was. To him, Gautier had appeared at first as rather an heroic figure, fighting the big fur company. Yet Morrison had known the truth at last and had been, in

a manner, grateful to Tom Ballard for the latter having saved him from the deserved fate which had overtaken Gautier and other renegades.

Just now, Jim Morrison might have been a valuable ally to Ballard, but the latter was content to play a lone game. The feud was between himself and Gautier, and the reckoning would come that way.

Still resolved to keep going as long as the moose-trail held out and he could follow it easily, Ballard hitched his pack to an easier riding position, took one step forward and then paused, as a feeling of sudden uneasiness swept him.

He stood there undecided, and unable to account for the sensation of fear. He glanced about, his rifle ready, his first thought being that he was haunted by some wild animal, but he could see nothing, and as there was no moon or star-shine to reflect light in the eyes of a wild creature, there were no tell-tale orbs to indicate the presence of a furred foe. He lifted his right foot to take another step, and hesitated again, as the warning came to him more unmistakably than ever.

The thing puzzled him greatly. But he had been long enough in the northern wilderness, since the time he and Kaska hunted together, living only on red meat from day to day as chance sent food their way, to realize that nature gives no false warning.

A COLD puff of air breathed in his face as he stood there. It seemed to come from almost at his feet. Then it was gone, and the night was breathless as before, with the darkness like a thick, velvety pall about him. But on sudden inspiration he got out a match, struck it, cupped it in his hands until his eyes could accustom themselves to the glare and then looked about him. Almost he gasped as realization of what the warning meant to him.

For, almost at his feet, was a great yawning canyon whose wall, sheer and perpendicular, dropped downward into nothingness! Had he taken one more step, he would have been certain to lose his balance and go plunging downward to his death. The puff of cold air which had come up from the bottom of the canyon had given a clue to the nature of the warning he had received. Even as horses or some other intelligent four-footed animals will pause at the brink of a precipice which they cannot see but which intuition tells them is there, so Ballard had paused just in time.

But as the match burned out and he lighted another, he saw something else and knew it for the handiwork of Cassiar Joe Gautier. The moose-trail which Ballard had been following ran directly to the lip of the cliff, and then turned sharply at a right angle. Gautier, as though possibly suspecting that Ballard might at last decide to follow the trail during the darkness, had arranged a clever trap. At the point where the trail turned aside abruptly, somebody—and unquestionably that somebody was Gautier—had covered the beaten path with dead limbs. Thus a man, groping his way with his feet, would encounter the brush and would assume that the trail went straight on. One more step and he would have hurled himself to death.

At least Ballard realized the devilish cunning of the man against whom he was pitting wits and strength, and he realized, too, that hereafter the greatest caution would be necessary. Gautier had planned this well; he had known that Ballard was skilled enough in woodcraft to be able to follow the trail which Gautier so far had taken no pains to conceal. Gautier wanted to get Ballard into the wilderness of the Upper Nesigak, where he would have the young factor at his mercy. Therefore, Ballard went on again but more cautiously than before. He was still going when daylight came.

Then he paused briefly for a lunch, and although weariness was upon him, he resolved not to sleep until night came; for every hour of daylight would be precious in enabling him to make better time.

As the light grew stronger, his first move was to ascertain how closely he had held to Gautier's line of retreat during the night. The moose-trail was still plain enough, and it was headed toward a mountain-pass which was now visible to Ballard.

Five minutes of scouting convinced him

that thus far Gautier was also for following the beaten path, for, although many wild animals had passed that way since Gautier had trod it, Ballard made out at last there in soft and damp ground the imprints of Sheila's small boots. He knew that his campaign so far augured well—that by traveling all night he had gained many miles on the fleeing outlaw. This thought buoyed him up—made him forget his weariness. After finishing a cold lunch, he struck out again.

Higher and higher into the mountains he went, while the overcast sky softened as rifts in the leaden grayness appeared. The air was still chill, however, and the threat of snow was unmistakable. Steadily, however, Ballard held on, reached the summit of the pass at last, and stood there gazing upon a new panorama spread before him—the region of the Upper Nesigak!

The land to which Gautier and Trayner had fled taking Sheila with them! The land which was ruled by a crazed Indian who murdered without compunction. A land of gold and rushing streams; a wilderness ringed by glistening mountain peaks, densely forested with spruce and other conifers. The haunt of the wolf, the grizzly, the great hunting felines, such as the lynx and wild cat—and the range of that lordly forest monarch, the moose.

And here it was, spread before him; an utterly wild and forbidding vista. Somewhere within its boundaries was the woman he loved. He could only pray that she was still alive and unharmed.

IX

IT was two days later, near dusk, when Tom Ballard paused to look back at the route over which he had come. Still visible to the southward was the mountain range which he had crossed, and beyond that was the valley of the Liard where he had worked out one phase of his own destiny years before. Physically he was worn, almost dead on his feet, yet he was buoyed up by the unswerving determination to carry on until he came to grips at last with Gautier, his enemy. Behind him were miles and miles of muskeg with its treacherous hummocks of moss and grass, where a man might flounder and die in the fine, silt-like mud if he lost his footing. Miles and miles of buckbrush, vine-balsam, willows, and down-alder, he had fought through also, since leaving the Liard River. But the moose-trail which had offered such easy going for so long had vanished now as the hoofed makers of it had scattered. But Gautier had kept on, apparently making no effort to conceal his tracks, and Ballard had persistently followed.

The general direction which the outlaw was holding as well established now, but to what spot it led in this wilderness, Ballard, of course, had no way of knowing. He wondered, however, why he had come across no trace of the Indian killer who was supposed to rule this region. Save for the wild creatures he met occasionally and who stared at him foolishly, for apparently he was the first human being they had ever seen, he came across no living thing. Gradually becoming convinced that the stories of Klunok's prowess were vastly over-rated. Perhaps, indeed, the killer had died, alone and unmourned in this wilderness.

Ballard glanced once more at the western sky. The sun had vanished, but there was still a well-marked circle of light on the horizon—the warning of the sun-dogs still held. But as yet no blizzard had come and if luck stayed with him he believed that he still had several days before winter would shut down.

At this moment, however, he was more deeply puzzled than he had been at any time since taking up the pursuit of Gautier. For, seemingly he had lost the trail.

It was true, that several times since leaving the Liard River, he had wandered off the trail, but always he had found it readily enough again. Now, however, it seemed that Gautier, was deliberately taking pains to conceal the tracks that he had been making. This might indicate that Gautier considered that Ballard had been tolled far enough into the wilderness. Therefore, the pursuer would do well to be on the lookout for an ambush made by the pursued. Ballard guessed that Gau-

tier's purpose was to lure him deeply into the wilderness and then leave him confused by covering up the trail Ballard had been following.

At this moment Ballard wished that Kaska might have been here. The old Indian, born and bred in the wilderness and trained from infancy to read signs which would be hardly discerned by an ordinary man, could have found Gautier's trail once more. No human being, however cunning and crafty in woodsmanship, could move through the forest and leave Kaska baffled and unable to follow. Ballard was a good woodsman himself, but this was a puzzle which he could not solve readily.

Moreover, as his conviction grew that Gautier was deliberately hiding his trail for some purpose which would be presently explained, Ballard knew a mounting sense of uneasiness. The sun gone, the shadows had melted into thickening twilight among the gloomy spruce trees. In this half-light it was hard to distinguish an object at any distance. What seemed to be a stump might in reality be a motionless form of a bear—or a man! Gautier might now be very close, not yet quite ready to strike, but watching Ballard even as one of the great hunting cats watches its prey that is unconscious of danger.

BALLARD stared around him in the gathering darkness, feeling baffled for the first time. Clearly he could not go on now; he would have to wait until daylight, and then try to discover Gautier's trail once more. How Gautier had managed to hide his own trail, particularly that made by the small boots of Sheila, was something which Ballard could not understand.

Gautier and Trayner were wearing moccasins which made scarcely an imprint in the carpet of needles beneath the conifers. In order to puzzle Ballard, they might have even picked up Sheila and carried her for some distance, careful themselves to walk along the top of logs and leave no signs which Ballard might follow.

All in all, it looked hopeless to him to attempt to go on now in the darkness. He was on the point of turning aside and crawling into the depths of some thicket where he could spend the night when his eyes caught sight of a peculiar white mark on the side of a willow sapling but a few feet away.

His first impression was that it was a "moose-blaze," or a place where the bark of the willow had been torn off by the strong teeth of some hungry moose that had passed that way. But he stepped closer to examine it.

He saw then that it was a fresh cut made with an axe! One side of the trunk had been split, and in this notch two sticks had been placed horizontally, in peculiar fashion. Stepping closer Ballard saw that they were not sticks but were arrows!

Crude yet quite cleverly made they were. For the tips they had black flint, sometimes called volcanic glass, which is nearly as hard as a diamond and which had been chipped off until now they presented a sharp point. These arrow-heads were lashed to the shaft with fine strips of sinew. The opposite end of each shaft was tipped with eagle feathers.

All this Ballard caught in a glance, but the significant position in which the arrows were placed drew his attention further. One was pointing directly down the trail up which he had come, while the other was pointing in the opposite direction! What sinister message was thus conveyed? That these arrows had been left here by Klunok there could be no question. And an Indian would have immediately interpreted the peculiar placing of the arrows, but Ballard, white man that he was, puzzled over it.

Suddenly the explanation came to him. The one arrow pointing directly toward him was a threat that if he went further into the domain of Klunok he might expect swift death. On the other hand the second pointing in the opposite direction, indicated the route taken by Gautier. The two arrows, therefore, were at once a warning and a challenge. If he would not turn back, would not heed the warning of the first arrow, then, by following the second arrow he might come upon that which he sought, but at the price of his own life.

That this was the message which Klunok had sought to convey Ballard was firmly convinced. Grimly enough, he was forced

to admit admiration for the rather clever way in which the crazed Indian had accomplished the thing. But why trouble to warn Ballard at all? Did Gautier know and approve of this message which Klunok had left for the pursuing white man? Puzzling enough was that question, and Ballard felt that he could not answer it.

Nor did he care, particularly. The warning he scoffed at, and the challenge he gladly accepted. Indeed, he felt almost grateful to this insane Indian killer that the queer means which Klunok had taken to warn him of imminent death had succeeded in unraveling the mystery of the vanished trail. Now with a new clue, Ballard told himself that he would press on.

But on second thought the folly of such a step struck him. And, too, the feeling persisted that he was being watched by unfriendly eyes. It might be Gautier and Trayner, although Ballard did not believe so—or it might be Klunok himself. They might be waiting to see what would be the next move he would make.

First, however, Ballard would establish that the second arrow really gave him the clue to the vanished trail. Cautiously and with gun at ready he moved forward in the direction which the second arrow indicated. Not more than fifty feet beyond despite the gloom which was deepening in the forest he discovered once more the imprints of Sheila Morrison's shoe!

The message of the guiding arrow, therefore, was a true one! Yet he could not go on much farther because of the growing darkness. Nevertheless, he would go as far as he could.

He had not taken more than a dozen steps, however, when the silence was shattered by the roar of a gun.

X

AS the darkness was stabbed by that vicious spear of whitish-yellow flame, Ballard felt himself half-whirled around, and he fell, convinced that he had been wounded. Yet he felt no pain, and then swiftly came realization that the bullet intended for his heart had torn its way through the pack which he carried on his back! In the gloom of the spruce trees, the outlines of a man were vague at best, and whoever had shot at him had unknowingly aimed at the pack instead of at his body. Resourcefully, though, and with his wits about him, Ballard lay there as though dead. But his rifle was ready, and he watched closely in the direction whence the shot had come.

After the shot, the echoes of which went chasing madly off through the forest aisles, silence settled over the woods once more. Nor was there so much as a movement of brush which would reveal the position of the would-be assassin. Evidently the person who had fired the shot was not to be easily trapped. He would make sure that Ballard really was dead or desperately wounded ere he would reveal himself. The position in which Ballard had fallen, left him hidden from the man who had fired the shot.

Ballard waited on, but still the unknown rifleman did not appear. Gradually the thing began to wear on Ballard's nerves. It was one thing to shoot it out with an enemy whom he could see, and quite another to wait here in the darkness unaware of what move the foe might be making. The minutes continued to drag on and Ballard held himself in check as best he could, but with mounting impatience.

Unable to bear it longer he gathered his knees under him and half-rose with the intention of crawling on all fours behind a nearby clump of brush from which point of vantage he might study the position of his enemy. But as he moved, there came again that sharp, bitter report of the rifle, and another bullet whizzed within an inch of his ear.

The second shot came from almost directly in front of him indicating that the foe had silently changed position!

Again Ballard dropped, but as he did so his rifle swept forward. Without throwing the weapon to his shoulder, he fired, the muzzle pointed instinctively at the unseen enemy.

A horrifying scream answered the shot, an eerie wail so weird and terrible that Ballard felt goose-pimples suddenly break out over him while his scalp seemed to crawl. For perhaps two seconds the cry

lasted, and then silence came again.

Ballard waited. At last it seemed to him that he heard the lightest crackling of brush from the direction in which he had fired, but directly this was gone. And he heard no more of that blood-chilling cry which had so filled him with vague foreboding.

He became aware now that the moon was rising, showing faintly through the thin curtain of mist spread across the sky. It gave but little light, but it did, however, relieve the pall-like gloom which had settled down over the woods.

Soon he became cramped from crouching in this unusual position. Moreover, now that his location had been established by the hidden rifleman, it seemed best not to wait too long. He believed that the man who had shot at him was Klunok, and if such were the case, the crazed Indian probably possessed such marvelous skill in woodcraft that he could creep up unseen and unheard until he could get a better shot at Ballard. Therefore, the young man determined to leave this spot as silently as possible. First, however, he would test the alertness of his foe. Bending low so that his head was hidden, Ballard moved the pack from side to side.

But no shots came. Twenty paces to the left, however, Ballard heard the softly muffled sound of breaking twigs. Peering in that direction, it seemed to him that he could determine a pair of glowing eyes, regarding him balefully as the faint moonlight found reflection.

Clearly, however, these belonged to some wild animal and had nothing to do with the ambush which had been laid for him. A bear, perhaps, even a moose or a wildcat, had been passing, and winded him. Ballard shifted his gaze for a moment and when he looked again the eyes were gone.

Nevertheless, he was gratified, for he felt that his chance shot had served to put fear into the man who had tried to kill him. As noiselessly as possible, Ballard crept into a thick growth of stunted balsam. There he carefully unlashed his pack, removed the sleepingbag and placed the pack in a position where it was partly visible through the brush. Then he crawled away some twenty feet where he got into the sleepingbag and, with gun beside him, composed himself to rest, although his nerves were too taut to permit him to sleep at that time.

He told himself that he might have investigated the spot at which he had fired, and from which the weird screaming had come. Nevertheless, that would be a hazardous thing to do. It would be better to wait until daylight. For all he knew he might be walking into a trap laid for him by the crafty Klunok, or whoever it was out there in the dark tangled brush.

SILENT and still were the woods, so that he could literally hear the beating of his own heart. High swept the moon, trying vainly to diffuse its pale light through the haze of the upper airlanes. Ballard's thoughts dwelt on Sheila, and also on the clash which he had come through safely.

He was convinced now that it was Klunok who had ambushed him. This fact, however, gave rise to other conjecture which was disturbing. Klunok had discovered the trail of Gautier; that much was certain. If Klunok was the killer which he had been pictured, then it was not unreasonable to suppose that he had managed to slay both Gautier and Trayner, and if Sheila had not met death also, she had been doomed to a worse fate.

At last there came to his ears from afar off a grunting, bellowing sound which he accurately determined was the challenge of one giant moose-bull to another. The love-moon was waning for the antlered clan, but still a few bulls roamed the hills in quest of mates. These, however, to Ballard were ordinary forest sounds and he paid no attention. But when the moon was high overhead, there came from afar the ghoulish howling of a wolf, a soul-stirring ululation which never failed to send a prickly sensation up and down Ballard's spine.

The cry seemed to typify the utter savagery and desolation of this wilderness.

Slumber came to Ballard's eyes and he slept fitfully, nervously, as does a wild animal who understands full well that vigilance is ever the price of life. His dreams

were troubled, and several times he came swiftly awake, convinced that some enemy was prowling near.

Dawn came at last; a bleak, raw dawn with the air a little chiller than it had been before, and the unmistakable smell of snow in the wind. Before the grayness overspread the land, however, Ballard crawled out of the thicket. He made directly for the spot at which he had fired the previous night, and from whence that horrible cry had come.

He located the place without difficulty, and his eyes searched the ground carefully. He found where the would-be assassin had knelt behind a clump of brush, for here was a slight indentation where a man's knee pressed into the soft mold. But Ballard saw something more.

On a patch of browning leaves was a brown splash of blood! There, too, on the ground where it had fallen unnoticed, was another arrow!

It had been Klunok who had ambushed him! And Klunok had been wounded, yet not so severely that he could not travel.

Somehow the discovery gave Ballard new hope. He had met Klunok and in his first clash with the insane slayer he had come off victor. He had put fear into Klunok's heart, and while it was probable that the Indian would seek to be revenged, he would go about it more warily than before.

Ballard returned to where he had left the pack and shouldered it. Easily enough now he located the trail which Gautier had made, and he struck off with a swinging stride through the forest.

There was no fear in his heart now, save the fear that he might be too late for anything except vengeance. Perhaps before another twenty-four hours passed he would know the truth concerning the fate of Sheila Morrison. He moved ahead.

XI

ALL that day Ballard pressed on, watchful as some hunting animal on the trail of prey. And not without reason, for it was by no means unlikely that Klunok, although wounded, might decide to wait in ambush. But Ballard kept as closely under cover as possible, and avoided openly crossing the little grassy meadows, which were plentiful up here, by skirting the edges of them and taking up the trail once more on the opposite side.

Nor was it difficult now to follow Gautier's trail. Indeed, it seemed, that aside from a single effort to confuse Ballard, the outlaw was perfectly willing to be trailed. Moreover, Ballard found some degree of comfort in the situation. If Klunok had killed Gautier and Trayner, possibly Sheila, also, it had been done farther ahead in the country of the Upper Nesigak. Still, this was by no means improbable, for Gautier might have penetrated well into the region ere Klunok discovered him. However, something in the fact that Gautier's trail still stretched plainly before him gave Ballard new courage in thinking that he might not be too late after all.

For Klunok, Ballard cared nothing now; he had no fear of the crazed Indian, although he would not needlessly expose himself to a chance shot. It was Gautier whom Ballard sought. Gautier, who had robbed him of all that was dear and precious. He firmly believed that Gautier would overplay himself in this crafty game of wits, strength and resourcefulness upon which he had entered. Ballard went on, still guarding against a surprise.

It was noon when he was puzzled by a new discovery. He had found the trail of Jim Morrison!

BALLARD, did not, of course, know the identity of the maker of those tracks. It was apparent, however, that they had not been made by Gautier or Trayner; it could be the trail of some lone prospector. The fact that the maker of the tracks was wearing moccasins instead of boots, made Ballard conclude that it was not a member of the Mounted, sent in pursuit of Klunok. Ballard would have liked to have followed them, but his immediate business was keeping to the trail of Gautier. He went on.

But after an hour of it, Gautier's trail vanished inexplicably. Just how it had been accomplished, Ballard could not know. He guessed readily enough, however, that

Gautier had been deliberately tolling him on all this time, and the fact that the trail was lost now, proved that Gautier probably was getting ready to strike. An hour's search for the trail revealed no sign of it. He knew that Gautier was a marvelous woodsman, the equal of any Indian, for that matter; and here, apparently, was a sample of his woodcraft. With mounting impatience. Ballard decided at last that he would cast about in a great circle, perhaps two miles in diameter, in the hope of once more picking up the trail. But he had not gone far when he found himself balked by a swift glacial stream.

It was too deep, and the fall of it was too great for him to ford it. The only thing he could do was to find either a log-jam or a tree which had fallen across the stream, if he was to get over to the opposite side. This necessitated going up or down stream. He determined upon the latter course.

He found it slow and painful work, this battling through the jungle of willows, alders, buck-brush and devil-club which grew rankly along the stream. There was danger in it, too, for he could not see where he was going, and there was nothing to prevent Gautier or Klunok, posted on some cliff, seeing him. But there was no help for it. He fought through this tangle for perhaps three hours, and gradually there grew in his ears the sound of a distant waterfall. Probably the glacial stream plunged over a cliff. As yet he had not found any place where he could get across the stream.

But presently the tangle of brush thinned out, and he found easier going. Then, abruptly, he came on where the glacial stream was fed by another creek.

This second stream evidently did not have its source at a glacier, for it was clear water, whereas the stream which he had been following was milky with limestone silt. Moreover, at the junction of the two creeks, there was an immense pile of flotsam, carried down by freshets the previous summer. By wading and bucking the current, he fought across until he stood with nothing but the second stream barring his way. He decided to follow this toward its source for a distance.

Evidently this second creek had been a booming river during the early part of the season, for there were great sandbars along its reaches. This made the walking easier for him, although he was compelled to wade frequently. Steadily he worked upstream until he came to a point where the creek turned sharply.

HE paused there, for the way seemed to be barred by perpendicular cliffs of smooth basalt whose summit was fringed with scrubby spruce and hemlock. The face of the cliff was covered with moss and lichens, indicating that it was veined with trickles of water which seeped through crevices from the high lands behind the gorge. Likewise, there were evidently mineral deposit in the rock-reddish oxides of iron and blue sulphate of copper —for the face of the cliff was colored as though some gigantic hand had painted it. But Ballard had seen such painted cliffs before, and he was concerned now solely with the idea of getting out of the canyon.

He went nearer the cliffs, to determine if the water was shallow enough there to permit him to wade past the obstruction. Presently he heard the steady murmuring of another creek. Going farther, he saw that from the foot of the cliff there boiled and bubbled a great spring, fed by some underground stream. It was clear and cold, and he bent down to drink of it.

Yet his lips did not touch the water, for his attention was attracted suddenly to a metallic gleam among the fine gravel which was deposited thinly over the rock in the bed of the stream. Wonderingly, he thrust his hand into the water, located that gleaming fragment, and drew it forth. It was a nugget as large as the tip of his little finger! *Gold!*

Moreover, there were other nuggets in sight. Indeed, now that he looked about him sharply, he saw that the bottom of the little stream which boiled out of the foot of the cliff was bright everywhere with that same eye-arresting sheen of gold.

Realizing what this find meant, the thought of the riches on which he had stumbled, drove thought of all else from his mind. He recalled what old Tsumpsit

had told him. This, then, must be the gold deposit at the foot of the painted cliffs, which the aged Indian had described. This must be the Nesigak Eldorado!

Still in that prone position, feasting his eyes on the display of wealth before him, Ballard looked up sharply as there came a light rattle of loose gravel from above. What he saw then brought him to his feet with a startled gasp.

Down the face of the cliff, dropping with the swiftness of a meteor, was a boulder weighing several hundred pounds. It was coming straight at him, and was so close then that there seemed no chance for escape.

But Ballard, in that swift glimpse, saw something more. High up at the rim of the cliff was the man who, intentionally or otherwise, had dislodged the boulder. That man was Cassiar Joe Gautier!

XII

WITH that huge boulder falling directly at him, Ballard seemingly had no chance to escape. There was no time, indeed, to leap to his feet, and dodge it. High up on the cliff, Gautier, watching the unsuspecting man down below, had waited until the intended victim had stopped to take a drink from the clear-water creek. Then, toppling the boulder from the ledge where it had been poised, he had the satisfaction of seeing that his aim was true. As accurate as a boy makes a "sink-shot" with marbles, the boulder fell. Ballard, involuntarily closing his eyes, rolled over nearer the face of the cliff.

As the boulder fell, it revolved rapidly. It was by no means round, but an angular fragment of basalt which had cleaved from the rock above by the action of frost. As it spun rapidly in its downward drop, one corner of it grazed the cliff-wall. It was scarcely more than a "kiss," yet it served to deflect the course of the boulder slightly. With an impact which jarred the ground and fairly submerged Ballard with water from the stream, the thing struck within less than six inches of him.

The shock was so severe that it nearly stunned him, even then. But as he realized that he had been spared, he jumped up and flattened himself against the cliff, out of the scope of Gautier's vision. For a moment he stood thus, debating his next move.

But on the heels of the boulder came the whining of a bullet, and a sharp *spat!* as the missile shattered itself on the coarse gravel at his feet. Gautier had seen that the boulder had missed Ballard, and now he was trying to rectify the mistake by means of gun-fire. He was chancing a shot, although he could not see the man below; he was hoping that the ricochet of a bullet might wound Ballard.

But before Gautier could again shoot, Ballard was under way, running swiftly along the foot of the cliff, keeping under cover as best he could. Now and then he was exposed, and invariably a bullet sang close to him. But in less than a minute he was entirely out of sight of the outlaw above.

Ballard stopped, gun at ready, while he strove for a shot at Gautier. But the wary outlaw, realizing that Ballard had escaped, was not minded to stand out there in plain sight as a target for the other. Nor did Ballard wait for long. He surmised that Gautier was already gone. The thing, therefore, was to get up on the cliff and once more take up the outlaw's trail.

Rather than being frightened by the nearness with which he had come to death, Ballard felt a measure of exaltation. He had at least located Gautier. True, he had seen nothing of Sheila, and there was no way of knowing what had happened to her. But Ballard did not believe that Gautier or Klunok had killed her.

So he struck off up the creek, still keeping under cover, and looking for a place where he could scale the cliff and reach the spot on which Gautier had stood.

It required an hour of the hardest kind of work to accomplish it. He was compelled to climb up a nearly perpendicular rock-face, where a misstep might mean death. The rock was slippery with damp moss and lichens, and the vine-balsam was a treacherous foothold which he knew better than to trust. Likewise, he was more or less constantly exposed to a chance shot by either of the two men he sought, or

by Klunok himself, who might have trailed him after their clash the night before. But no shots came, and when Ballard had gained the cliff, and began working his way stealthily through the brush to the spot where he had last seen Gautier, he felt new confidence.

After all, he told himself, he could play this game as well as his foes. True, he was not the seasoned woodsmen they were, but Kaska had imparted to him much of the craft which the old Indian had in stalking big game. He came out at last at the place where Gautier had stood.

HE marked the big man's tracks in the soft earth, and even noted the empty shells from Gautier's rifle. He saw where Gautier had gone back into the woods. All the while he was there, Ballard realized that he was courting certain death, for Gautier was famed as a hunter, and it was not unreasonable to suppose that the outlaw was lying in wait, ready to shoot him down.

Yet the thing did not happen. Luck played with Ballard as he risked himself thus, for he was hot with impulse and eager to come to grips with his foe. Where he was aided, however, was in the mental make-up of the giant. Gautier considered it an ill-omen that Ballard had so miraculously escaped the falling rock and the subsequent gun-fire. Apparently Ballard's hour had not struck.

Therefore, Gautier would toll him deeper into the wilderness, and set a new trap for him. One who was woodsman enough to outwit even Klunok, as Gautier had done, getting the crazed Indian at a disadvantage so that he could reason with him and enlist his aid, could have slain Ballard, had the moment seemed propitious.

But to Gautier it was not propitious; therefore, like one of the great hunting-cats who, having missed the first leap, withdraws as though to think it over, so Gautier was loath to follow up any advantage he might have had at that moment.

Besides, there was plenty of time. Ballard would not leave the country so long as Sheila Morrison was Gautier's captive; and on the other hand, the outlaw knew that winter was at hand, and very soon Ballard would not be able to leave the country even if he so wished. It suited Gautier, therefore, to bide his time, and lay new plans for vengeance.

This, of course, Ballard could not know, but he would not have cared anyway. So eager was he to come to grips with Gautier, and rescue Sheila that he was impatient to the point of recklessness. Yet he would not walk blindly into a trap. And so, while he set off on the trail of Gautier he was as cautious and as watchful as possible. He had not gone a hundred yards into the woods, however, before he made a discovery which set his heart thumping with new hope.

The tracks of Sheila's small boots! After all, she was still alive, despite Klunok. Trayner's tracks were there, too, and Ballard was puzzled to discover the trail of still a third man.

Not for an instant did he dream that her brother was also a captive. The discovery worried him somewhat, for his natural guess was that Gautier had been joined by a third renegade. Nevertheless, Ballard was not intimidated, nor was his determination weakened.

He forged on until dusk, holding closely to the easily-distinguished trail, which led higher into the hills.

But now he deemed it best not to travel by night. So close was he to the object of his pursuit that to grope blindly in the darkness and lose the trail, would be fatal.

He would do better to camp as soon as it became too dark to see the trail, and to resume the search with the first hint of dawn. He suspected that Gautier would keep on until long after dark, in order to gain time, but Ballard was convinced that, alone, he could travel more rapidly than could Gautier, Trayner, Sheila and the stranger.

So Ballard made camp, cautiously as usual.

He crawled into the depths of a wind-fall, spread his sleeping-bag, and sought slumber, yet ever alert, as a wild animal sleeps.

XIII

THE night was unusually silent, even for a wilderness which knows true silence when the wind is hushed. The sky was still thinly overcast, so that there was no moon, but the air was curiously warm. This portended snow, as Ballard well knew, but the storm probably would hold off for a few days.

Despite the fact that his nerves were strung taut, he slept well, but his ears were attuned to catch the slightest sound. Thus the activities of a deer-mouse in a clump of weeds, as the small rodent busied itself storing up a supply of food to last throughout the winter, brought Ballard wide awake and listening. But he interpreted the light rustling of weeds correctly, and once more he slept.

He awakened again with a feeling that something was wrong, as though he was the subject of a malevolent scrutiny. He sat up and scanned the dark thickets about him, but could see nothing. Nevertheless, he had that same feeling of disquietude that he had known when Klunok had stalked him.

Hearing or seeing nothing, Ballard presently lay down once more but not with the intention of sleeping. He lay there listening, every faculty alert.

And because his ear was resting close to earth, it seemed to him after a time that he heard a soft padding sound which came over this ground telegraph. The sound was utterly unlike that of a man's footsteps, and he knew that it was made by some wild animal. That, perhaps, explained his uneasiness; the thing had been watching him; and now was cautiously circling the thickets wherein he lay.

But he had no fear of it, if such were the case. No wolf, lynx or even a grizzly bear had the courage to attack him as he lay there, he believed. Once more he composed himself for slumber; but as he was about to woo the drowsy god, he heard from the nearby ridge the weird call of a wolf. Talapus, ever persistent, was telling Klunok that once more he had found prey. But Ballard heard the wolf-cry with indifference. It was at a season when wolves were accustomed to call one another, and it had no significance to him. Again he slumbered.

HE awoke with a feeling that, although it was still dark, dawn was not far away; the air had taken on a certain rawness and a cool night wind had sprung up. He crawled out of his sleeping-bag, rolled it up, ate breakfast, and when it was light enough to travel, he set out once more on the trail.

The tracks were plain in the soft mold and Ballard moved forward swiftly. He was determined that before the sun sank behind the western hills this day he would have it out with Gautier. Already nature had been tolerant in withholding the blizzard, but he realized that the storm would not be postponed much longer.

He surmised, too, that Sheila did not know that he was so close, although she undoubtedly believed that he was searching for her. Probably Gautier would keep secret from her as long as possible the fact that Ballard was following. If she knew Ballard was close at hand, she would undoubtedly redouble her efforts to escape.

As dawn came, Ballard saw other signs of the threat of winter. Great flocks of ducks, the sound of their many wings blending into a soft whispering, which suggested waves breaking on a distant shore, passed close overhead; while higher in the air, v-shaped wedges of white geese beat steadily southward, the metallic clangor of their voices drifted down to him faintly. These signs meant that farther northward winter had already gripped the land and that very soon the white hosts of Boreas would have added the Upper Nesigak to territory already conquered.

The sun was breaking through clouds over the eastern hills as he crossed a small clearing at foot of a rock-slide, and it was at that moment that the thing happened.

At the edge of the clearing Ballard had hesitated because he realized that he was courting death in crossing it. Yet Gautier's trail led in that direction, although, of course, no tracks were visible on the rocks, and Ballard had no recourse but to take the chance. He bent low, running as rapidly as he could, but just as he

was about to enter the brush on the opposite side, something dealt him a smashing blow in the left shoulder, and he whirled half-around and fell.

As he went down he saw on the ridge above outlined by the sky, and not more than one hundred and fifty yards away the silhouette of Gautier in the act of lowering a rifle. This, then, was the trap which the renegade had set for his pursuer.

ON the heels of that tremendous shock came excruciating pain, and Ballard put his hand to the wounded shoulder, and felt that the coat and shirt were already wet with blood.

Ere Gautier could shoot again, however, Ballard, regaining his wits, rolled and crawled his way quickly to the shelter of a nearby thicket. Nor did he stop there, but kept on while bullets ripped the brush about him. Gautier sprayed death through the thicket, and some of the bullets came so close to the young man's head that he could feel the wind of them.

Ye he was safe. Moreover, he was determined to carry the fight against Gautier at this moment. Slipping off his coat, and shirt, he saw that the wound was merely in the flesh of his shoulder. No bones being broken, and although it was extremely painful it was by no means serious.

It bled profusely, which was good for it. It was in such a position that no tourniquet could stop the bleeding but Ballard knew that no arteries were severed, and that in a short time it would congeal of its own accord.

He took a piece of cloth torn from his shirt and wrapped the wound as best he could, slipped on his coat again, and then, gun in hand, he began working his way through the thicket toward a point where he could command the ridge.

Suddenly he dropped behind a rock, and as he did so another bullet sang over his head. But his own gun roared instant response, and the figure which he had momentarily seen against the horizon vanished abruptly as though it might have been hit.

An instant later he shot again, as his eyes detected another moving figure up there. Then the ridge was devoid of life, and grimly, he settled down to wait.

But he did not wait long. He deflected the muzzle of his gun slightly until the sight covered a hat rising slowly from behind a rock up there. Below the hat, which was evidently pulled well down over the wearer's eyes, was a coat; he could also see the muzzle of a gun. His first impulse was to seize the advantage and shoot; yet he withheld his fire.

And the reason he did so, was because the figure up there seemed to be too unnaturally bold. He suspected a trick for he did not believe that Gautier, Trayner, or even the third man, would reveal himself so carelessly. But what kind of a trick it was, Ballard could not fathom. It might be that Gautier, gun ready was watching for a chance to shoot the instant Ballard fired. Suddenly grown impatient, however, Ballard decided to take the chance anyway, so eager was he to wipe out Gautier and his band. But as his right forefinger tightened on the trigger, the figure up there suddenly came to life.

Indeed, it leaped upward, there was a shrill scream, and then Ballard with a gasp of horror realized how closely he had come to doing something more terrible than he had ever dreamed.

For the figure crouching up there was that of Sheila! Gautier or Trayner had forced her to don the hat and coat, and then held her up from behind the rock so that she would offer an easy target for Ballard's gun. Gautier's fiendish hope was to have her killed by her sweetheart!

Sick at the realization at how close he had come to blighting his own life forever, Ballard was on the point of retaliating by sweeping the ridge with gunfire when his eyes caught sight of something moving stealthily through the trees perhaps half a mile below him.

It was a queer, misshapen figure, bent, and dressed in skins; and it was a man, for a rifle trailed from one hand. Klunok! But that was not the thing which seemed most strange to Ballard.

At the heels of this crazed Indian was a wolf!

XIV

SINCE Klunok vanished after she had first seen him, neither Sheila Morrison nor her brother heard of the Indian. On the other hand, Gautier seemed more in a hurry than ever to penetrate farther into the hills, and Sheila suspected he had reason to believe that Ballard was not far away. The renegade although he offered her no harm, frequently taunted her by declaring that Ballard was not woodsman enough to follow them. Even if he did so, Gautier pointed out, Ballard would meet certain death.

So they kept on, climbing higher and higher into the hills, crossing glacial streams, miles of muskeg, fighting their way through windfalls where the down-trees lay as thick as jack-straws.

Strangely enough, however, the big man at times actually seemed to become ingratiating. Woman-like, she saw the reason for this readily enough. Gautier was vanity personified, and under other circumstances, had he not been a fugitive but had moved with freedom in the world of men, he would have been termed a "lady-killer."

Again, however, Gautier was his true self, as though he saw the hatred in her eyes which she took no pains to conceal. Trayner she gave little thought; he seemed wholly in the power of Gautier, and had not the initiative to make any move of which his master did not approve.

Hopeless and dispirited Sheila had been for the first few days since Gautier had dragged her from the sinking canoe, and with Trayner started on their long trek into the wilderness. She had grieved for Kaska, whom she believed to be dead.

The north country is a wide land, and it seemed next to impossible that Ballard could trail them into the wilderness. Then the sensible thing for him to do, as she had seen it, would be to invoke the aid of the Mounted Police, and with skilled Indian trackers take up the hunt.

Even so, however, she had known that it would not be Tom Ballard's way. Hot-headed and impetuous as he was, he would promptly set off on the hunt alone and unaided, thereby minimizing his chances for success. Nevertheless, she loved him for it, for she realized that such impulsiveness was merely a manifestation of his love for her.

But now that Jim was with her, she felt comforted. She realized that her brother would not be permitted to stand in the way of any plans which Gautier might have for her; yet his very presence reassured her.

Yet never were they allowed to be alone. Trayner, evidently acting under order of Gautier, was always present, doubtless to make sure that they did not hatch some plan for escape. In fact, Trayner's sole duty seemed to be to act as their guard. He was a squat, but powerfully-built man with an evil face. And he always held his rifle in readiness. Jim was compelled to carry a part of the outfit, but not so much as either Gautier or Trayner, both strong men who swung along under weight of their packs apparently without noticing them.

"Jim," Sheila said suddenly to her brother one day, "do you think that Tom has already discovered what has happened, and set out in search of us?"

Her brother shook his head.

"He might have untangled the thing by this time," Jim replied. "But it doesn't seem to me that there's a chance that he can overtake us before the snow comes, and that will be too late, unless I miss my guess." Then, seeing that for the moment, Trayner was not in hearing distance, Morrison added:

"My only chance is for me to get hold of a gun. Like a fool, I let myself be caught off-guard before, because I never dreamed that I was running into Gautier and Trayner. Once let me lay hands on a rifle, and I'll finish the job before Tom gets here, if he ever does. He must be far behind us now, even if he's found our trail at all."

Sheila shook her head.

"But I can't help feeling that he is not far away right at this moment," she whispered, that Trayner might not overhear.

AND it was a few minutes later that Gautier, leading the way as usual,

stopped suddenly like a dog who has scented game. With a motion of his hand he halted Trayner and the others. They waited there while Gautier, still watching something which he had seen, began slowly stealing forward.

There came to their ears suddenly a dull, thudding sound, muffled and faint. It was the impact of the boulder striking the creek-bed after Gautier had pushed the huge rock from the top of the cliff. On the heels of that they heard the sharp bark of his rifle several times, and then silence.

"Tom!" breathed Sheila.

"It might be the Mounted," countered Jim, but his sister shook her head.

"No, I know it was Tom," she insisted. Then they saw Gautier returning swiftly. He was frowning, but at sight of the girl the old sneering smile lighted his face once more.

"Your friend, Ballard—he is no more," Gautier remarked. "First I crush heem with a big rock, so, and then I finish the job with my gun. Don't worry, *ma cherie,* that he is going to come along and spoil our little friendship."

But Sheila intercepted a quick glance which Gautier shot at Trayner and so did Jim Morrison.

"You lie, Gautier," Morrison retorted. "It was Tom Ballard, all right, I'll believe that; but the very fact that you shot so many times proves to me that he got away!"

Sheila gave an exclamation of thankfulness, but Gautier's face went black. He stepped forward and slapped Morrison with the back of his huge hand. The blow almost knocked the boy down, but for an instant it seemed that he was going to spring at Gautier; then he controlled himself. After all, there was Sheila to consider and if he were gone—the odds were great that Gautier would kill him—she would be left alone with these brutal renegades. White-faced, yet calm, Morrison faced the giant.

"I'll kill you for that some day, Gautier," he remarked coolly. Gautier sneered at him.

"But no!" the giant replied. "When the time comes for you to keel me, M'sieu Morrison, you'll be quite dead yourself. I have not forgotten that you turned on me. I let you live now because you are ma'mselle's brother. Later, it is for her to say whether or not you shall die. You understand?" He grinned at them triumphantly.

There was no mistaking his meaning. Sheila flushed deeply, while her brother went white and seemed on the point of hurling himself at Gautier's throat, but she stopped him.

"You love your brother, *hein?*" went on Gautier, still smiling. "I have no doubt, ma'mselle, how you will decide when the time comes." He turned away abruptly and led off through the woods, while Trayner at the rear with rifle ready, signified that they were to move on.

"The beast!" raged Jim. "If it comes to that, Sheila, you'll never have to make a choice to save my life. I'll kill myself first!"

But she did not reply. At that moment, perhaps, she was silently praying that she should never have to make the decision, that Tom Ballard would have arrived. She had vast confidence in Ballard; it had already been demonstrated that, big though Gautier was, the young factor of Liard Post was his master. He had beaten Gautier at every turn and he would do it again. If only he would arrive in time!

For the rest of the day they pressed on at an unusually rapid gait, and it was not until darkness had fallen and the way became too thick for them to travel, without being able to see obstacles, that Gautier ordered a halt. Brother and sister stood apart while Trayner undid the pack, got out the grub, and built a fire. Meanwhile, Gautier, with a few deft strokes with his axe, lopped off limbs which he piled on the ground for Sheila. For himself, Trayner and Morrison, he cut no boughs.

Presently the meal was prepared, a sketchy meal at that, as though Gautier was minded to conserve food as much as possible, and then he spread his sleeping-bag, crawled within, and almost immediately the heaviness of his breathing indicated that he was asleep. Morrison spread his own bag at the side of the

bough bed after arranging the bag belonging to Sheila.

On the opposite side of the fire Trayner sat, scowling thoughtfully at them. He made no attempt at slumber; when midnight arrived he would awaken Gautier, who would take the watch from then until it was time to start. For they took no chances that either of their prisoners would escape. Thus it had been since the flight into the Upper Nesigak had begun.

Sheila, exhausted by the long marches which she had been compelled to make since leaving the river, very quickly fell asleep, but Morrison lay awake a full hour, his thoughts dwelling heavily upon the situation ere he gave himself to light slumber. He awoke, at last, to see that Gautier had replaced Trayner on guard.

THE big man was on the opposite side of the fire staring at the sleeping Sheila, an inscrutable look in his eyes. At last he softly tip-toed around the fire, until he came close and stood over her as though gloating. Presently he discovered that Morrison's eyes were wide, regarding him watchfully. This seemed to discomfort Gautier, for he hastily turned away to his old position on the opposite side of the fire.

Before daylight, Gautier aroused everybody and soon they were on their way again.

In those early morning hours they traveled rapidly. Soon they began climbing a great rock-slide. At the top of it Gautier called a halt, and looked back over the route they had come. Suddenly he motioned for all of them to flatten down.

Evidently Gautier had seen something. Although Sheila could not make out that anybody was following them, something told her that Tom Ballard was coming. The thought thrilled her, and at the same time she felt fear; for she realized that Gautier was preparing a trap. Thus they remained for perhaps fifteen minutes, and then Sheila's pulse quickened as she saw a familiar figure through the woods.

It was Tom Ballard, and he was about to cross the open space at the foot of the rock-slide. She saw Gautier, an evil smile on his face, swing his gun into position and make ready. She cried out, as at the first shot Ballard dropped. But she gave an exclamation of joy the next instant as Ballard rolled and crawled toward the nearby thicket.

She heard Gautier cursing as he fired shot after shot into the brush where Ballard had gone. And then came the answering shot from Tom Ballard's rifle which told her that he was not dead. One bullet spattered against a rock so closely to Gautier's face that he ripped out an oath and staggered back, and for a moment she thought that he was wounded.

After that, silence settled down over the rock-slide. Presently she heard Gautier and Trayner speaking in low tones.

At last Trayner took off his hat and coat, and crawled over to where she was lying behind the rocks. Seizing her roughly, he slipped her arms into the coat, jammed the hat on her head, pulled the brim low over her eyes, and then seizing her around the waist slowly forced her up from behind the rocks.

Sheila struggled, for she realized her danger. She knew that she faced death from Tom Ballard's rifle. Unable to bear the ordeal longer she screamed and tore herself from Trayner's grasp.

While this was going on, her brother lay but a few feet away. Gautier's rifle in the middle of his back.

"Thank God!" Jim cried, as Sheila sank back out of sight. "Ballard is too smart for you, Gautier. He'll kill you yet, if I don't."

Gautier snarled at him, disappointment and rage on the big man's features. Gautier's ruse had failed.

THEN from down below came a burst of rifle fire. Sheila knew that Tom now understood the trick which Gautier had attempted to play upon him. Bullets sang over the head of Gautier, or ricocheted from the rocks; but none came close to Sheila. Crouching there, Gautier waited until Ballard's rage had spent itself, Cautiously then the giant peered out from behind his rock and gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Klunok comes!" he said in a low tone

to Trayner. Both Sheila and her brother saw far below them in the timber the slinking form of the crazed Indian. The wolf mystified them, as no doubt it did Gautier and Trayner, but it was apparent, too, that the creature was tamed.

"Klunok will either kill Ballard or drive him out into the open!" exulted Gautier. "You, ma'mselle, shall see your lover die!" He smiled his triumph at her. Worried and anxious, Sheila would have called out a warning to Tom had she not then seen him move. He, too, was looking at the incoming Klunok. It was apparent that he saw the Indian.

Suddenly Gautier turned to Trayner. "Klunok is mad," the renegade explained. "And he may not understand. You, *mon ami*, guard with your life these two, while I go down below to intercept Klunok. You have two guns and if Ballard starts this way, you can stop him very easily. Klunok and I will come upon him from behind." He backed away from the rock behind which he had been lying, and then began his stealthily circuitous stalk down through the brush toward the oncoming Indian.

Gautier had no more than vanished when Sheila felt her brother's eyes upon her. She knew then what was in Jim's mind; that this was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. While Gautier was gone they would overcome Trayner, if they could, and make a break for liberty to join forces with Tom Ballard down there. And before she could speak, her hot-tempered brother had carried the plan into execution.

It was rather a large task to which Trayner had been assigned, anyway. He was compelled to keep watch on the hidden Ballard down there and at the same time guard these two, who, he knew, were ready to take instant advantage if the opportunity offered. He took his eyes off Jim Morrison for a moment, and still carrying the two guns, started on a crawl for the rock behind which Gautier had lain. But at the first move Morrison was on him like a wildcat.

Fear and anger lent strength to Morrison, and luck was with him at that. He half-leaped, half-fell upon Trayner, the first blow catching the outlaw at the base of the ear, stunning him. As Trayner with a sigh rolled over upon his back, Morrison smashed viciously again and the man lay quiet, senseless.

"Here!" Jim cried, as he retrieved his own rifle, wrenched from Trayner's hands the outlaw's gun and handed it to Sheila. "I won't stop to kill him. We're going to help Tom!" The next instant they were hurrying down the slope direct for the spot where they had last seen Ballard.

XV

IN the main room of the trading-post at McLeod Landing, a solemn conference was in progress. McTavish was there, and so was Father Allard. Presiding over the conference was Tomlinson, district superintendent of the big fur company which both Ballard and McTavish served. It was Tomlinson who had given Ballard a chance to make his way toward the top in this north country.

Likewise, there was Inspector Cargill, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, spick and span in his scarlet-and-gold uniform. Outside the post, waiting the result of the conference, was a detachment of ten Mounties, with a good-sized pack-dog outfit. By a forced march they had come over the old trail from the southward to Telegraph Creek, and then another forced march had brought them to McLeod Landing, the head of navigation on the Liard.

It was the most pretentious show of strength on the part of the Mounted that had ever been seen at McLeod Landing. Usually but two or three men were assigned to the duty of rounding up such a criminal as Cassiar Joe Gautier, but the fact that here were ten Mounties, commanded by an inspector, indicated that they considered the job to be of more than ordinary importance. Inspector Cargill explained the situation to the others.

"We have determined that this expedition of ours is to be the last one in search of Gautier and Trayner," he announced. "There will be no turning-back; we shall keep after the fugitives until they are taken.

"And at the same time, we shall account for this crazed Indian, Klunok. In the past, luck has played with him, and he has managed to evade capture. The Upper Nesigak country is so large and in many parts almost inaccessible, that ordinary patrols sent in search of Klunok have been unable to run him down. We are taking enough men this time to cover the country thoroughly."

Tomlinson nodded.

"Until Gautier, Trayner and Klunok are accounted for, this country is not going to be safe for any man," he pointed out. "You see what has happened to the Indian, Kaska, and the girl, Sheila Morrison. Gautier would never dare commit such on outrage unless he believed that he was going to make his escape good in the Nesigak country. But, at the same time, he will have to contend with Klunok, who owes allegiance to no man, and who kills impartially all who come into the land which he regards as his own private domain. It may be that Klunok and Gautier, between themselves, will settle our problem for us, or at least make the work easier."

But the inspector shook his head.

"I am by no means sure of that," he remarked. "There was a purpose behind the selection, on Gautier's part, of the Upper Nesigak country where Klunok lives. True, Gautier is in flight, but there are safer regions for him in which to hide out. We have learned that between Gautier and Klunok there is a sort of strange friendship, or at least there was at one time. It may very well be that they have joined forces."

McTavish put in:

"Then that spells death for poor Tom Ballard, who, hot-headed as are most lads of his age, struck out alone to rescue Sheila Morrison. He'll never come out alive I'm thinkin'."

Tomlinson turned to the inspector.

"You have an ample force of men," he said, "but at the same time the fur company wishes to extend to you such aid as it can offer. There are a few of our trappers who have not as yet gone out to their winter camps. They are at your service."

"Thank you," replied Inspector Cargill, "but the Mounted does not depend upon posses of civilians. If you wish, however, there is nothing to prevent you from organizing a posse of your own, Tomlinson. We shall welcome the co-operation of your men.

"But we can use a guide. When we started on this expedition, I had in mind obtaining the services of this Indian, Kaska, whom I regard as one of the best trackers in the North. But I find that he has been wounded, that he is unable to go. We must, therefore, push on as best we can, striking for the Upper Nesigak country, and trusting that we may come across the trail of the men we seek.

Father Allard spoke up.

"I have had all I can do to prevent Kaska from getting up and going in search of Ballard, whom he idolizes," the cleric said. "It would probably mean death for Kaska at this time, but still he is not convinced that he shouldn't go."

Cargill shook his head.

"We won't take him," he decided. "He could be of little help to us in his present condition, and would only slow us down. It must not be forgotten that time is extremely precious just now. We do not know what has happened to the girl whom Gautier captured, and Ballard's fate is also a mystery. Wasn't there a brother of this girl, somewhere in this country?"

McTavish nodded.

"I'm thinkin' he's also in there," the factor remarked. "He left here on a prospectin' trip, and while he was always a wee bit close-mouthed, I suspect that he went into the Nesigak."

"Countin' the girl, there's three of our folks in that country now, and there's three of the worst outlaws the north has ever known, in there, too. I'm not givin' to prophesyin', inspector, but I'm thinkin' there'll be plenty of blood shed before ye come by McLeod Landing once more."

AT that moment, there was a knock on the door. McTavish opened it. A sergeant of the Mounted stood there. At sight of his superior officer, the Mounty saluted.

"An old Indian has just come up-river,

sir," he reported. "He hails from Liard Post. Thought he might have some information for us. He says his name is Tsumpsit."

"Tsumpsit?"

McTavish gave an exclamation.

"There's the man for ye, inspector!" the factor cried. "Old Tsumpsit must know the Nesigak country. 'Tis rumored that he's been in there himself."

"Send him in!" ordered the inspector shortly.

"Yes, sir!" the sergeant said.

The old Indian appeared at the doorway, and stood there blinking in mild bewilderment at sight of the men gathered in the main room of the post. McTavish addressed him.

"Come in, Tsumpsit," he invited. "'Tis news we have for ye; and maybe ye can help us. Tom Ballard's gone, and so is the white girl who was to be his squaw. Maybe ye can help us."

The old Indian digested this information, and then slowly, a smile twisted his lips. All Indians are inordinately vain, and it pleased old Tsumpsit mightily that these white men, particularly the Mounted Police, should admit that he could be of service to them.

"I know," he replied solemnly. "I hear about Ballard. Him in much trouble. I come tell you."

McTavish turned to the others.

"The underground telegraph!" he remarked jubilantly. "'Tis an uncanny way these redskins have to hearin' what is goin' on in another part of the country."

"Tell us about it, Tsumpsit."

MacTavish pushed forward a chair and the old Indian seated himself.

"Two, t'ree days ago, white crow fly out of forest and speak to me," Tsumpsit went on oracularly. "He tell me Ballar' in much trouble. White squaw in much trouble, too. Another man—friend of Ballar'—him in much trouble."

"That must be Jim Morrison!" guessed Tomlinson. "But how do you know so much about it." he demanded of Tsumpsit. "There was no white crow—"

"Excuse me, sir," put in McTavish diplomatically. "'Tis best not to contradict him. That's his way of tellin' what he learned."

"Go on, Tsumpsit," he urged. "Tell us more."

But the old Indian's lips closed resolutely. It was apparent that he was offended. The act of Tomlinson in doubting him made Tsumpsit deeply resentful.

"No tell more," he replied stubbornly.

McTavish sighed.

"And that, gentlemen," he remarked, "is all that ye'll get from him, I'm thinkin'." But Inspector Cargill addressed Tsumpsit.

"We know you speak the truth," he said gently. "We did not mean to doubt you. Is Ballard your friend?"

Old Tsumpsit nodded vigorously.

"Then you can be of help to us," went on the inspector. "We need a guide to take us into the Nesigak country. The white father has said that Klunok, who is under the protection of the Saghalie of the Skies, must be taken away, so that he will kill no more men. Two other very bad men, Gautier and Trayner, are in there, too. The Nesigak must be safe for all men hereafter.

"Will you show us the way?"

Old Tsumpsit considered this for a moment. He was old, and travel was an arduous thing for him. He much preferred to be alone at his home in the forest, to eat and sleep when he chose, and to dream of the days when he was a strong young buck to whom hardship meant nothing. The Nesigak was a rough, cruel country to one who was old, as was Tsumpsit.

Still, Ballard was his friend. The young factor of Liard Post had treated him fairly.

"Me go with you," said Tsumpsit suddenly, rising from his chair. "Me show you the way!"

Tomlinson stood up also.

"I'll gather what men I can," he told Inspector Cargill. "We'll make this drive a sweeping one, and when we've finished, the Upper Nesigak is going to be safe, for the first time in years!"

XVI

IN that mad flight down the rock-slide, to join Ballard, Sheila and Jim

Morrison knew that they courted death from the rifle of either Gautier or Klunok. Rather than permit the girl to escape, Gautier would kill her; and, of course, he would not spare Jim Morrison so long as there was no purpose to be served in so doing.

Slipping and sliding, now hidden behind a boulder and now in plain sight, dodging behind clumps of brush growing in interstices of the rocks, they descended. As they neared, they saw the amazed Ballard, as though unable to believe the evidence of his eyes, rise up to greet them, disregarding enemies who might be waiting to kill him.

He clasped Sheila in his arms, their first reunion since she had departed for the "outside" nearly a year before. And under what strange conditions had their reunion taken place! The plans they had made for meeting at McLeod Landing, the wedding, and then the honeymoon in the hills—all this had been swept aside by the power of circumstance. Now they stood in the shadow of death, here in the heart of a virgin wilderness. Still, they had each other; and that recompense was enough, even though it might last but a few brief moments.

For what seemed a long space of time, Ballard had eyes for nothing else but his Sheila, who had been restored to him, not even aware of her brother, Jim, being there. The girl was crying and laughing by turns, hysterically, while Ballard sought to soothe her with endearing words meant only for her ears.

"I was afraid—you wouldn't find us—that you would be killed!" sobbed Sheila. "Gautier gloated over his intention to kill you—and as for me—"

Ballard smoothed her hair tenderly.

"Don't talk about it, dear!" he urged. "Thank God that I've found you, that I was not too late. Gautier is not going to harm us."

Then as though for the first time, he saw Morrison. Ballard grinned with surprise and pleasure.

"You, Jim?" he asked. "How did you get here?"

Morrison told him.

"But we've no time to lose," Morrison concluded. "Gautier is already on his way to join Klunok, and they'll cut us off. Trayner is still up there on the cliff. He'll be coming to shortly. There was no use tying him, and I couldn't murder a helpless man. But we've got his gun, although Gautier and Klunok are still armed."

Ballard nodded. Once more he was his old self. Sheila, too, had controlled herself.

"This way!" ordered Ballard. "The game has changed. From now on Gautier will be the hunter, instead of the hunted. We'll strike for the river, keeping ahead of him if we can.

"But I haven't finished with him yet. There is the reckoning to come. But I want to see Sheila safely out of his hands before I settle with him."

It was Ballard who gave Jim Morrison the route they were to take, which was the most direct one leading to the Liard.

JIM MORRISON went ahead, and after him came Sheila. Tom Ballard trailed at the rear, gun ready, for he suspected that the attack which threatened would come from that direction.

At the point where the reunion had taken place they were virtually between Trayner on the cliff above and Klunok, and possibly Gautier, who must have been joined by the Indian by this time, at the rear. Trayner could be disregarded for the time being; besides, he had no rifle. But they must move in a way to avoid Gautier and Klunok.

The Indian had vanished since Ballard had stood up for one last look. With him had gone the wolf which they knew must have been tamed by the savage. But that a meeting between Klunok and Gautier had taken place, there could be no question. So, they struck off in a wide loop which would eventually take them back to the old trail once more. They traveled as swiftly as they could and still maintain the pace for any length of time. At the rear, watching always for a glimpse of Gautier or Klunok in pursuit, walked Ballard.

An hour passed, and there had been no sign of pursuit. This struck Ballard

as unusual; still, he realized that Gautier doubtless had lost some time in ascertaining what had happened to Trayner. Possibly the lesser outlaw, too, might have been hurt worse by Morrison's blows than was apparent. In any event, time slipped by, and the fleeing trio seemed to be making good their uninterrupted escape.

The sun mounted to the zenith, and began swinging toward the western hills. The air had a marked tang to it, and the circles of light which dogged the march of the orb across the heavens gave mute warning that time was indeed precious if he was to reach the distant Liard before winter closed down. Now and then he spoke an encouraging word to Sheila, for he realized that the rapid pace which they had set must be telling severely upon her slighter physique.

"We're burning daylight, honey," he assured her. "Soon it will be dark, and even Gautier and Klunok cannot follow us then. If we can keep ahead of them tonight, we've got a good chance of making it to the river.

"Besides, Gautier won't dare follow us too far. He knows that the Mounties must be out looking for him by this time, and he would be running the risk of meeting them." To her brother he counseled: "Keep a sharp lookout ahead, Jim. There's no telling but that Klunok and Gautier have managed to get ahead of us, and are arranging a little party for our benefit. But I think they're still behind."

"I hope so," Jim said grimly.

Soon they were once more on the trail, for they had completed the loop just as Ballard planned. He felt not a little jubilant when he saw again the familiar tracks in the soft mold. He paused to study them more carefully. All the tracks, even his own, as he had followed the trail, pointed in the same direction.

"It means that Gautier and Klunok are still back there," Ballard pointed out, "unless they have avoided this trail, and are cutting through the woods to head us off.

"If we can keep on until darkness comes, we'll have the jump on them. Even if they do hold to our trail at night, it will be slow work for them. I know, because I've tried the same thing."

"But you forget the wolf," Sheila pointed out. "The wolf which accompanied Klunok. If the animal is as tame as it seems to be, might not Klunok use it to trail us at night."

Ballard started at her words. It was true that he had forgotten the wolf. It might very well be that Klunok and Gautier could follow the beast at night, the infallible nose of the wolf picking out the way as easily as though they had left a plain trail.

"We've got to take that chance," he announced. "There's no way out of it. But from now on we can consider the wolf as much an enemy of ours as is Gautier, Klunok or Trayner." Again they were under way, and silence fell among them, for there had come an added uneasiness from Sheila's words.

It was one thing to be trailed by human beings who, no matter how skilful, might be outwitted; but there would be no such thing as throwing the wolf off the scent. For the first time they felt something of the sensation experienced by criminals fleeing from trained bloodhounds. Jim Morrison, leading the way, for the trail was easy to follow, scanned the coverts ahead more closely, while Ballard redoubled his watch at the rear. And, by and by, they crossed a stretch of muskeg, plunged into the brush and came out at last on the lip of a cliff. There Ballard paused.

It was the same cliff from which Gautier had started the boulder which had so nearly crushed Ballard as the latter had lain on the edge of the stream whose bottom seemed almost paved with golden nuggets. But in order to get out of that same canyon, and to reach this point, Ballard had gone upstream for some distance.

"Here's a chance for us to save time," he told the others. "That cliff is steep —almost straight up and down, for I saw it from the bottom. But if we can get down here, we'll save a long trip upstream. Down there, we can pick up my old trail once more, and strike directly for the Liard.

"Think you can make it, Sheila?"

She turned back from her contemplation of the awful depth and smiled.

"I'd dare more than that—for you, Tom," she whispered. And Jim Morrison found it discreet to become absorbed for a moment in studying the steep rock-wall down which they must descend. Suddenly he gave an exclamation.

"Mountain goats have gone down here!" he announced. "That doesn't mean that we can get down as well as they did, for they've jumped from one ledge to another. But at least there's a sort of trail."

Ballard found that it was so. Those daring alpinists in shaggy white, who had pioneered a trail down the cliff, possibly to reach the creek at the bottom of the canyon, had taken a route which would appall a human being; nevertheless, it seemed possible that the descent could be accomplished.

Ballard went first, that he might catch Sheila in case she slipped, while just behind her, sometimes steadying her, came Jim. They were halfway down, when the girl cried out:

"Look!"

AT the edge of the cliff which they had just quitted a wolf stood, looking down at them without fear. Sheila's guess had indeed been right. Talapus had trailed them. He would show Klunok and Gautier the route by which the fleeing trio had escaped.

Ballard paused and unslung his rifle, which he had been carrying over his shoulder while descending the cliff. But ere he could aim the weapon the wolf melted from view.

"Come on!" Ballard told the others. "We've got to hurry. Gautier and Klunok can't be far behind."

It was perilous work, going down that cliff. A misstep might mean death on the rocks below, and there was, too, the danger of dislodging a boulder. Besides, Gautier and Klunok might appear at any moment above, and have the fleeing trio at their mercy. Now and then Sheila muffled a cry, as it seemed that she must surely be hurled into space; but always Ballard was there with a comforting word. White-faced and silent, Jim Morrison made the descent.

And they reached the bottom at last, safely, although they had numerous bruises. Tom Ballard's wounded shoulder had stiffened, until each movement gave him a sharp twinge of pain, yet he made no complaint.

"At least that's over!" cried Jim Morrison in relief, once they were at the bottom. Then his eyes glimpsed the little stream, with the telltale specks of gleaming yellow gold on its bed-rock bottom.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Look, Tom!"

Ballard nodded.

"I found it on the way here," he replied. "But old Tsumpsit found it ahead of me. He it was who told me of the painted cliffs, and the gold deposit at the base."

Morrison shook his head in amazement.

"I never dreamed of such a find as this," he marveled. "If the boys at McLeod Landing knew of such a 'strike' as this, all the outlaws in the north couldn't keep them out of here."

He would have waded into the stream to garner a few nuggets but Ballard halted him.

"No time for that," Ballard decided. "Klunok and Gautier can't be far behind, and every moment is precious to us, now. We've got to get out of here on the double-quick, to beat winter and beat these outlaws. The gold won't vanish. The stuff is no good to either Gautier or Klunok. Next spring we'll come back and get it."

Swiftly, then, he led the way through the forest, retracing the route he had taken in coming into this place. All the remaining hours of daylight they kept going, and only when darkness fell did Ballard order a halt, that Sheila might gain needed rest.

But she would not permit them to tarry long. She understood that it was she who was slowing the pace, making them easier victims for the outlaws who could not be far behind. Darkness gave the pursued an advantage, and she insisted upon making the most of it.

On and on they went through the silent

woods, their way unlighted by any moon, for the sky was deeply overcast. It was near midnight when the thing happened.

XVII

IN single file the three of them had been holding their way. Ballard moved ahead, and after him came Sheila, while Jim Morrison brought up the rear. Since the coming of darkness, they had not troubled to keep to the trail. The trail made no difference now anyway, except, perhaps, that it made the walking a little easier. Besides, by striking blindly through the forest, holding only in a general way toward the distant mountains of the divide which must be crossed before they could once more reach the Liard and supposed safety, they made it as difficult as possible for Klunok and Gautier to follow.

Yet it was so dark, and the way was so rough, that they proceeded only at the imminent risk of life and limb through a stumble or fall. Time after time they did fall, but without serious result.

Ballard was for stopping until daylight, for he feared Sheila would hurt herself. But she would not listen to it, declaring that they must not be delayed through consideration for her. So they went on, fighting brush every foot of the way. At last, when they were crossing a ravine, which was choked with windfalls, Ballard heard her cry out.

He was perhaps fifty feet ahead of her, and whirling, he turned back quickly. He found her lying on the ground, crying.

"I've twisted my ankle," she told him. "And that means—we can't go on! Gautier and Klunok will overtake us."

Ballard's heart sank; nevertheless, he tried to keep up a cheerful front. He knew now that he should have adhered to his first intention, to camp for the night, in order to avoid just such a happenstance as this.

"Looks like we're sunk," declared Jim Morrison. "Well—"

"No!" announced Ballard. "We're not sunk. We're going ahead just as we were. We won't travel so fast, but we'll keep going. If we wait here, either the outlaws will overtake us, or we'll be trapped by the storm.

"Cheer up, Sheila!" He patted her hands in the darkness. "We're not whipped yet, by any means!"

Ballard stooped and picked her up. She exclaimed at the pain as she tested weight on her injured foot, and would have fallen had he not steadied her. His own wounded shoulder still gave him agony, but he made no complaint.

"Lead the way, Jim," he told Morrison. "I'll take care of Sheila even if I have to carry her." Had they been given time they might have rigged a rude hammock on which they could have carried the girl, but every moment was precious. So they went on, Jim Morrison in advance, and bending aside the brush so that Sheila, supported by Tom Ballard, could hobble.

A quarter of a mile of it, however, and Ballard felt the girl suddenly go limp in his arms. Gamely enough she had not protested against the excruciating pain she was suffering. Worried, Ballard let her down and chaffed her wrists while Morrison brought water in his hat from a nearby stream which was heard trickling in the darkness. Presently she opened her eyes, and saw dimly Ballard's face bending over her.

"Tom!" she cried, and her arms went around his neck. "I hate to be a quitter, but I—I can't go on!"

Ballard handed his rifle to Morrison, who was already carrying two guns, including the one he had taken from Trayner.

"Better make an armful of it, Jim," Ballard told him. "I'll have an armful myself, because I'm going to carry Sheila. *We're going on!*"

He straightened up, the girl in his arms, and then as Morrison led the way, Ballard followed, bearing his burden.

SHEILA knew better than to protest. As she felt his strong arms about her and looked up into his face she marveled at the change which the northland had wrought in this man since she had first met him.

Two years of life in the north, a rigorous life, and his character, too, had been given a hardening process. He was a

man—certainly the most wonderful one, Sheila told herself, that she had ever known—a veritable young giant in stature, and clean at heart as the wind which blew down from the cold mountain peaks . . . A fighter now, who by his courage and persistence had overcome almost insurmountable obstacles, penetrating thus far into the wilderness to find her. . . . A man to worship. Sheila's arms tightened a little more about his neck, and then from the darkness ahead, she heard her brother give an exclamation.

There was a rattle of guns as Morrison dropped two of the weapons he was carrying. There followed the flash of a rifle, the startlingly loud report of it; a weird cry, which was at once a war-whoop and the savage scream as of an animal. Twice more Morrison's gun flashed.

Then Ballard had put Sheila down quickly, and with a shout of encouragement to Jim Morrison, was gone.

There was no doubt as to what had happened. With the aid of the wolf, Talapus, the outlaws had trailed the fleeing trio as easily in the darkness as though it had been broad daylight. Moreover, Sheila's injury had slowed the pace which Ballard had set at the beginning.

Lying there half-dazed by the unexpectedness of the happening, Sheila heard the crashing of guns ahead. But from close at hand and to one side of her there came the slightest rustle of dried leaves as they were pressed by a soft-padded foot. In speechless terror she was aware that within three feet of her was some low-moving thing, its outlines hardly perceptible in the gloom. . . . Something shaggy. Klunok, the crazed Indian, was clad in the skins of animals; or it might be the wolf, Talapus!

Suddenly she straightened up, and the scream which had been choked unuttered in her throat rose to her lips, for the thing was close at hand, almost touching her—

XVIII

AT the first warning of the ambush set by Gautier and into which Jim Morrison had led them unwittingly, Ballard had dropped Sheila. He sprang to Jim's side, and seized one of the rifles. A second later he had thrown it to his shoulder and fired at what seemed to be a moving shadow.

That horrible scream answered him, even as it had answered him the night he had been ambushed by Klunok. But whether it was the Indian at whom he had shot, and whether the bullet had found the mark, was something which Ballard could not tell. Beside him, Morrison was blazing away.

Then from the rear had come Sheila's cry, and instantly Ballard had regretted his hasty action in leaving her. It had seemed improbable that harm could come to her so suddenly, for she was but a few paces back there, while up ahead the real attack was going on. Disregarding the unseen foes, Ballard raced back.

But that cry was the only clue to guide him. Of a sudden the woods had become silent, for Morrison had stopped shooting and no longer was the fiendish screaming to be heard.

"Sheila!" called Ballard doubtfully. But no answer came back to him. "Sheila!" he cried again, as a horrid realization broke on him, for he knew that he was standing on the exact spot where he had dropped her. But there was no sound. Yet it seemed that he heard from a distance a mocking laugh. He could not be sure of it.

"Sheila!" he called again. Then to Jim Morrison who had come up behind him:

"Jim, they've got her! They framed this attack just to get her! They hoped to kill me, perhaps, but they knew they could torture me worse if they carried her away.

"Jim," and a queer note crept into his voice, "everything that I've done has been for naught. Gautier has her and he won't let her get away this time!"

Jim Morrison clapped him on the shoulder. Boy though he was, Jim had many manly characteristics and in this crisis he was almost calm.

"Buck up, Tom," he counseled. "At least there's two of us now to trail them, where as before you were alone. What can be done once can be done again." He

tried to put a note of cheerfulness into his voice, but there was a ring of hopelessness in it which Ballard did not fail to detect.

"Jim," replied Ballard, "I'm going about this thing now with the assumption that I'm too late, but Gautier is not going to miss his chance of vengeance this time. But whether he does or not it makes no difference. I ran from him before because Sheila was with me, and I hoped that we could escape from these cursed hills before winter set in, but it seems that we haven't one chance in ten thousand now.

"So I'm going to stay, and I'm not going to leave this country until Gautier, Trayner and Klunok are either dead or in my hands. I'm going to take Sheila away from them again and then, instead of trying to get back to the Liard, I'm going to continue to hunt them down. I should have done it before—it was the one mistake I made. But I wanted to get her to safety first before I squared accounts with Gautier."

Jim's hand gripped his shoulder.

"We're in on this together, Tom," he said evenly. "What you have sworn I'll back to the limit.

"But let's look the situation in the face. Sheila is still alive; of that I am certain. But Gautier has her and he's gone; and we can't follow him in the darkness. Yet I know that both of us will go crazy if we sit here and wait until daylight. Besides, Gautier will leave no trail this time—that is, no trail which anybody but a skilled Indian trapper can follow. He knows that he's got us at his mercy, that we won't try to leave the Upper Nesigak, and that winter will soon be at hand, which will cut off our last chance of escape. We can't find his trail and we can't follow him unless we do. Yet the inaction of waiting until daylight will kill us!"

His hand, resting on Ballard's shoulder, could feel the bigger man trembling, yet Morrison knew Ballard well enough to realize that this was not a sign of hopelessness or weakness; but simply the outward manifestation of a soul torn with agony.

"But I can follow him, Jim!" exclaimed Ballard. "I may not be able to see the trail he leaves, but no man can hate another as I hate Gautier, and not be led straight to him, as though a compass was pointing the way. He can't escape me even though he roams all over the Arctic. I'll—

"LISTEN!" Ballard broke off to speak the cautioning word. From somewhere close at hand came a groan.

"It's one of the outlaws!" cried Jim Morrison excitedly. "I wondered how it was that we missed every shot. They didn't dare to return the fire as they wanted to, either through fear of hitting one another or perhaps hitting Sheila."

"This way!" ordered Ballard softly. "And look out for a trap!"

Softly he moved in the direction whence came the sound. Then, gun at ready, he paused. Suddenly he threw the weapon to his shoulder.

"Strike a light, Jim!" he commanded. "I'll cover him!"

Morrison came up beside him and obeyed. Cupping his hands about the match he peered into the darkness, in the direction Ballard's gun was pointed.

"I see him!" he said at last. "I don't think it's a fake, either." He moved forward and bent over an object which lay behind a clump of brush. Suddenly he straightened up.

"Trayner!" he said wonderingly. "And he's wounded."

Ballard examined the fallen man. It was clear that Trayner was hard hit, for he lay as though dead. Ballard wondered, of course, how Trayner came to be there at all, for the man had lost his rifle after Jim Morrison had knocked him out. Beside the man's right hand was a wicked-looking knife, and at sight of it any regret which Ballard might have felt in shooting down an otherwise unarmed man, vanished. Armed with a knife and in the darkness Trayner was like some prowling cougar, ready to strike down its victim from behind.

Ballard kicked the knife out of the way and turned the wounded man over. By the light of another match, Ballard saw that Trayner's eyes were half-open. The wounded man was mumbling something

Ballard could not understand save that he made out the words, "Gautier," and "Klunok." The eyes closed to open again more widely and stare up into Ballard's face, and then a sardonic grin twisted the outlaw's lips.

Ballard had made only a superficial examination of Trayner's wounds, but that examination had convinced the young man that the outlaw was near death. Suddenly Trayner spoke.

"Where's Gautier?" he asked in a hoarse whisper. "Where's that crazy Indian?"

"Gone," replied Ballard. Then, on sudden inspiration, he added:

"They left you behind here to die, Trayner."

But the outlaw smiled.

"Gautier got away with the girl," Trayner exulted. Apparently the effort brought him a fresh twinge of pain.

"But not far, Trayner," went on Ballard. "The big thing is that they left you behind—to die!"

The smile vanished from the outlaw's lips and he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the flickering light from the match which Jim Morrison held above his head, showed an expression of fear in the man's face.

"They left you behind to die," Ballard stressed the thought.

"You lie!" retorted Trayner quickly. "I'm not going to die and Gautier will be back in a little while to get both of you!"

But Ballard shook his head.

"You know better than that, Trayner," he told the wounded man. "Gautier's not going to be bothered with you any longer. He knows that you'd only be a drag on him. So he left you here. You'll never see Gautier again. You've been a useful tool to him, but he needs you no longer."

Trayner sighed and then his face was contorted in new agony.

"Listen, Trayner," urged Ballard. "There's a chance for you to square yourself, after all. Tell me where Gautier and Klunok have taken Miss Morrison!"

Seemingly, the convincing ring in Ballard's words had an effect on the wounded man, although doubt still showed in the latter's face.

"Tell me the truth!" Ballard urged.

But Trayner suddenly laughed; a mirthless laugh which ended in a gasp.

"To hell with you!" he told Ballard. "Gautier was my friend, you'll never find your girl—until it's too late. . . . Gautier is my friend—he'll come back and get me. He'll—"

TRAYNER broke off, as a paroxysm seized him. When he opened his eyes, Ballard and Morrison had risen.

"All right, Trayner," said Ballard grimly. "You can die, then—alone, and in the dark. We're going on to find Gautier, and when we get him, we'll tell him that you stuck by him to the last. He'll laugh at that, because he knows, Trayner, that you're a fool!

"Come on, Jim!"

But as they were about to turn away, a cry from Trayner stopped them.

"Don't leave me!" begged the wounded man. "Stick by me a little while. See—I'm going fast. But I don't want to go like this—alone, and in the dark!"

Yet Ballard only laughed harshly. He could not forget that it was Trayner who had helped Gautier spirit away Sheila Morrison, after shooting Kaska.

"Don't!" cried Trayner. "So help me, Ballard, I'll tell you all I know—if you'll keep the matches burning—awhile longer. I'm afraid—of things—in the dark. Ballard," and his voice rose to a wail, "don't go!"

Quickly, Ballard bent over him again, while Jim Morrison struck another match.

"You've got your chance, now, Trayner," the young man urged. "Take it!"

Trayner swallowed hard. The match burning between Morrison's fingers seemed to fascinate him.

"Klunok's cabin," he said with difficulty. "Not more than twenty miles from here—up that stream, beyond the painted cliffs. But you can't find it at night, and you'll never have a chance to get near it in the daytime. Klunok placed it so that he can see anybody coming before they get within two miles of him. Then—there's the wolf—a killer, like its master. That wolf—always watching."

He paused, and they could hear him breathing, almost fearfully, as the match went out and Morrison struck another.

"Your girl," continued Trayner, his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, you'll never see her again. Gautier plans—" But he broke off, as another spasm of pain seized him. When the agony passed, it was apparent that the coma which precedes death had arrived. He lay there with closed eyes, but still alive.

Ballard looked at Jim.

"You heard what he said," Ballard declared in a queer voice. "He won't be able to tell more.

"Anyway, I'm not going to wait. Stay with him, Jim. It won't be long, in any event. If you don't find me before daylight, you can pick up my trail by the painted rocks."

The match burned out in Morrison's fingers. He heard Ballard moving swiftly away through the brush.

By instinct rather than by means of his five senses, Ballard held to the general direction which Trayner had indicated. It was improbable that Gautier believed pursuit would start before daylight. Even then, the outlaw could not have surmised that Ballard knew where Sheila would be found—assuming that Trayner had spoken the truth, which seemed logical. Therefore a slender advantage lay with Ballard and he was grimly determined to make the most of it. With the killing urge in him fully aroused, he moved rapidly through the woods like some hunting animal on the trail of prey.

He traveled as noiselessly as possible, yet the leaves which lay banked in windrows beneath the deciduous trees, as well as the matting of needles among the conifers, were brittle-dry and rusted to the tread of his feet. For weeks there had been no rain, and the snow had not arrived; hence the woods were like tinder despite the advanced season.

While Ballard strove to be as cautious as possible, he did not believe there was any real need for it. Gautier and Klunok would not be expecting him to follow until it was light enough to travel easily; hence they would have gone on to their rendezvous.

XIX

HOUR after hour he threaded through the forest, sometimes groping in the blackness where the trees stood close together, and at other times swinging along at a rapid stride as he crossed one of the high meadows. It seemed to him that his eyes had acquired a sort of night-seeing faculty which picked the best route for him. At last, it seemed to him that he detected light in the sky some distance ahead. This must be the first hint of dawn.

But on second thought he did not understand how it could be so, unless he had unwittingly become twisted as to directions. Dawn naturally would start in the southeast at this time of year; yet the light which he saw, and which grew amazingly even as he watched it, was in the north. But it seemed to concern him not at all, and he went on.

Presently, he was aware that down from the peaks toward which he was traveling, there breathed a cold wind, a hint of coming winter. Such a wind in the north at this time of year might easily portend a blizzard, and again he remembered the warning of the blazing sundogs in the northland sky during the afternoon.

There was scant hope that he could accomplish that which he had set out to do; but he gave the thought no consideration. He was recklessly determined to rescue Sheila and square accounts with Gautier, no matter what price had to be paid.

The light in the sky grew rapidly, he observed. Moreover, it seemed to be stretching toward the horizon to right and left. He saw, too, that instead of the pearly glow which marks the false dawn, this was more of an angry glare in the sky. It was fiery red. Then, as a puff of breeze came more strongly to him Ballard had sudden realization of what the sky-glare meant.

AHEAD, the woods were on fire! It was by no means an unusual thing in the heavily-forested regions of the north, even at this season of year, for

the woods were tinder-dry and dangerous as a powder-magazine. A chance bolt of lightning might set the woods afire in a twinkling.

Yet Ballard knew there had been no electrical storm for weeks; therefore nature was not responsible for this incipient blaze. It could be nothing else than the work of Gautier!

Ballard paused, as understanding came to him. With the wind blowing in the face of the pursuer, Gautier would be running no risk to himself in starting the blaze. Doubtless he had protected himself, anyway, by getting on the other side of the river, beyond the painted cliffs. His hope was not alone to turn back Ballard, but to trap the pursuer and consign him to a horrible death.

The threat of it held Ballard appalled. Yet he had no thought of turning back. No scheme which Gautier could devise would turn him back.

He struck off again, conscious that the smell of smoke was growing more and more pungent. Under the urge of the wind, the flames were sweeping directly toward him. The first snowfall would quench the blaze, but ere that happened, either Gautier or Ballard would be dead.

The chance by which he had wrung the truth from Trayner, as to where the outlaws had taken Sheila, stood Ballard in good stead now. He knew where his objective lay, and he could reach it by a circuitous route, to avoid the flames; whereas, had he blindly plunged forward, trusting luck to overtake Gautier, he would most certainly have died, just as the giant outlaw had planned. It would be futile, however, to try to get through the fire directly.

But Ballard knew where the river lay. Once let him reach it, and he believed that he could penetrate the barrier of flame. Therefore, he swung sharply to the left, in which direction he knew the stream must lie.

Yet none too soon. Fanned by the strengthening breeze, the flames were sweeping closer and closer, until the dense clouds of smoke made it almost impossible for him to see his way. Nevertheless, the glow of the fire lighted the forest, and helped in that respect, at least.

Ballard was worried about Jim Morrison back there. Still, Morrison was an experienced woodsman now, and could doubtless take care of himself. Anyway, Ballard knew that he would have all that he could do himself to reach the river ahead of the fire, which seemed to be sweeping along the right bank of the stream. He plunged off through the woods.

For a time the ground was fairly level, although thickly-overgrown. But now it became more uneven, and he was aware that it pitched downward rather sharply. This indicated that not far ahead was the river, that he had already entered into the valley of the stream.

To his right, the fire was pressing closer; so close, indeed, that hot sparks from the flaming spruce trees, showered him steadily. But he was unafraid, knowing that the river could not be far ahead now. The ground fell away more steeply, until he was threading his way along the bottom of a canyon which must debouch into the river.

As he moved on, slowed somewhat by numerous windfalls which were strewn along the canyon, he saw the flames passing behind him on the higher ground, crossing the trail he had made. But he did not care, for safety lay ahead. Suddenly, he stopped stark, alarmed by what he saw.

FOR several minutes now he had been traveling down the canyon whose walls had grown precipitous, unscalable. But he had not doubted that presently, even above the roar of the fire, he would hear the roar of the stream. Now, however, he had come to a sheer drop-off which ended in blackness. The canyon had ended abruptly on the lip of a cliff. The river might be below—it *must* be, he reasoned—yet how far down the stream was, he had no way of knowing. Nor, indeed, did he know how he was going to get down to it.

He was trapped! Behind him the flames had cut off retreat; he could not climb the cliffs on either hand—and he apparently could not descend the cliff in front. Moreover, the air-currents drew the smoke down through the canyon until

he was nearly blinded, and felt as though he must die of asphyxiation unless he got out of the place soon.

He took one more look at the flames behind him. They were moving with astonishing rapidity down the canyon. No chance to get through them. Safety, if it existed for him at all, lay ahead. There *must* be a way to get down! And he must find it quickly. But as he walked to the edge of the precipice and peered downward, he could see nothing but the black tops of rankly-growing spruce trees —maybe twenty feet below, maybe fifty, or even a hundred.

Just below the lip of the cliff, however, he saw a narrow ledge. At least he could get down this far; and once there, another ledge might be within reach. With renewed hope, therefore, he started downward.

He reached the ledge without difficulty, and was overjoyed to see another projection of rock just below. But he was in a precarious position, for the ledge was covered with vine-balsam, a hardy shrub which grew flat on the rock, its roots fastened to earth in a crevice. The balsam was as slippery as ice, and Ballard realized that a misstep here might mean death.

The smoke was eddying over the cliff now, choking him, and he knew that the situation was desperate enough to warrant any chance. Gripping a double-handful of the vine-balsam, after slinging his rifle by a strap over his shoulder, he gingerly let himself over the edge into the dark.

There he hung for an instant, while his feet groped for the rock below. Finding it at last, he loosed his hold above slightly, still unwilling to trust his full weight to the lower foothold. But as he did so, the vine-balsam which he was gripping, weakened by the strain which he had put upon it, suddenly gave way.

With a scream uttered involuntarily, he dropped, plunging into the blackness below.

XX

WHEN Sheila Morrison regained consciousness after her swoon, it was with the sensation of being jolted along through darkness over a rough trail. At first she had no clear conception as to what had happened; she remembered only that some kind of creature—it might have been the tame wolf, or it might have been the crazed Indian—was about to leap at her. Then merciful oblivion had come.

But now she was being carried in some kind of a rude hammock slung between the shoulders of two men. She half-lifted herself, and saw that ahead was a bent form, clad in shaggy skins, the poles of the hammock on his shoulders. Klunok! She would have screamed, had she not heard Gautier's voice—behind her!

"You are awake, ma'mselle?" he asked. She did not reply, but dropped her head again; and then she heard him give a brief command to Klunok. The two men came to a halt, and the hammock was lowered to the ground.

Gautier stood over her, in the gloom, and the girl would have risen had not her injured ankle given her a sharp twinge of pain. She fancied that Gautier was smiling.

"It is finished," said Gautier simply. "All is finished now, ma'mselle. Your lover, Ballard, and your brother—by this time they are dead. So, too, is poor Trayner, perhaps." Gautier shrugged, affected to sigh regretfully.

"Dead?" cried Sheila. "Tom Ballard and Jim—dead?"

Gautier nodded.

"This time I no lie to you, ma'mselle," he explained. "I make sure of eet.

"We cross the rivaire. Before we cross, I set woods on fire. Ballard and your brother, they try to follow. They get caught in fire—they die for sure." He bent lower over her and she could see his white teeth glisten as he smiled.

"Too bad, eh?" he asked. "But you are lucky girl, ma'mselle, to have real man like Cassiar Joe Gautier to look after you. Now we go to place where nobody can come until snow melts next spring. By that time, we be far away—into the north. You be wife of Cassiar Joe then, *hein?*"

He looked at her a moment, chuckling. But she said nothing, for no words would express her emotions at that moment. She

believed that Gautier was in reality lying, when he said that Ballard and Jim Morrison were dead; nevertheless, there was a ring of sincerity in his words.

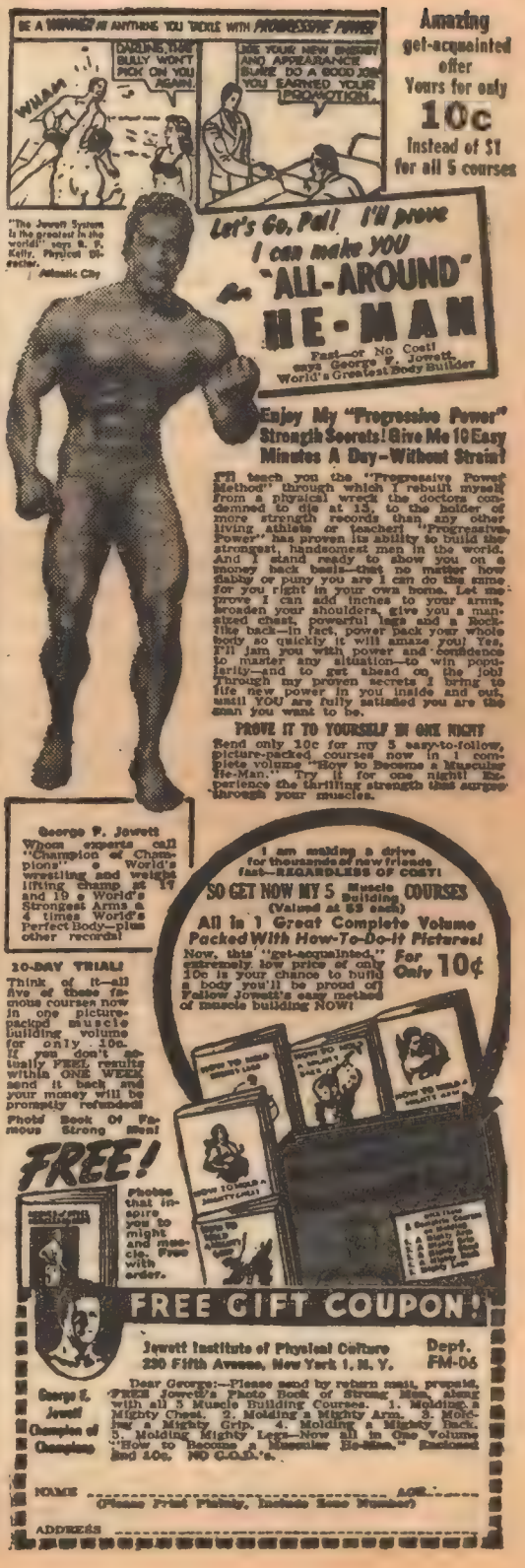
Gautier spoke again to Klunok, and once more they were under way, carrying the girl between them by means of the poles which they had lashed together with thongs of dried caribou-hide. It was an uncomfortable couch at best, but Sheila was too tormented with fears to complain. Her swollen ankle was paining her severely and even had she been given the opportunity, she would have had no chance to escape, for she could not walk.

On through the darkness they went and as they began to climb Sheila became aware that behind them, on the opposite bank of the river they had quitted, was a growing glare in the sky. Gautier had spoken truly, then, when he told of starting the forest-fire. She was sick at the thought of what had doubtless happened to Tom.

At last, after winding up a rocky trail, they halted and she was put down. Then Gautier was lifting her to her feet. Sheila saw that they were before the door of a small, low-roofed cabin, rudely constructed of logs and brush and thatched with poles on which had been shoveled a foot or more of earth. Klunok, with a grunt, opened the loose-hung door, and motioned them inside. Carrying her in his arms, for it was apparent that she could not walk, Gautier stooped as he entered the low doorway.

Presently Klunok struck a light, although the girl saw that dawn was at hand, that the eastern sky was graying. But inside the cabin, which apparently had no window other than a mere loophole in one end of the gable, it was still dark. Gautier placed the girl none too gently on the couch, which was covered with untanned pelts of wolf and beaver. Then both men ignored her, while they busied themselves getting food. Silently, the girl watched them.

The cabin had no stove, merely a crude fireplace. From a haunch of moose, which hung from a rafter Klunok cut off several thick slices of meat. These he stuck on spits before the fire which Gautier had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started. Soon the meat was sizzling. But it was no more than fairly warmed through, when the Indian seized one of the slices and began to eat it ravenously, after the fashion of an animal. He made guttural sounds of pleasure as he ate.

Gautier, however, cooked a slice of meat more carefully and offered it to the captive, but she refused. The hardships which she had endured, as well as her mental suffering, had driven all desire for food from her mind. The outlaw shrugged and calmly proceeded to eat the meat himself.

Presently the meal was finished. There were no dishes to wash, no cleaning-up to do. Klunok merely wiped his greasy fingers on his clothing and squatted before the fire, studying the blaze. Gautier sat facing the girl and she felt his eyes upon her broodingly, although she sought to avoid his gaze. Daylight crept into the room—a thin, weak daylight, as though the clouds of smoke from the forest-fire had drawn an opaque screen across the sun. Suddenly Klunok, who seemed to be half asleep, raised his head quickly, in an attitude of listening.

Sheila listened, too, but heard no sound. Klunok, however, rose to his feet with an effortless, gliding motion and went to the door, which he threw open.

THE girl, involuntarily gasped at what she saw. The wolf was there; a great shaggy brute whose jade-green eyes were instantly fixed upon her balefully. For an instant the wolf regarded her and it seemed to her that all the cruelty and ferocity of his nature was in his gaze. Then he looked up at Klunok, as though questioningly.

Suddenly the wolf wheeled and started away; but only went a short distance before he stopped and looked back. Understanding shone in the Indian's eyes. In an Indian jargon, he said to Gautier:

"Talapus says an enemy comes!"

The girl who understood something of the language which the Indian used, felt a queer thrill at his words. An enemy? That might be Tom Ballard, after all. Or perhaps her brother. Still, it might signify that the Mounties, who were undoubtedly on Gautier's trail by this time, were approaching. In any event, an enemy to Klunok and Gautier was a friend to her, whoever it might be.

Gautier rose to full height, with a startled exclamation. He spoke rapidly to Klunok. Undoubtedly the wolf had not lied; but the two of them would go to make sure. Gautier turned on Sheila.

"If eet is M'sieu Ballard, which I ver' much doubt," the outlaw said with a grin, "then I shall be more fortunate than I hoped. We will bring him here and you shall see him die, ma'mselle." He turned again to Klunok and spoke briefly.

At his first words, that he and Klunok would set out to make sure who it was approaching, Sheila had felt a new thrill of hope. It meant that they would leave her behind, beheving, doubtless, that she could not escape, crippled as she was. Yet it would give her an opportunity, nevertheless. But Gautier's later words shattered this hope.

"Talapus, the wolf, will stay to keep you company, ma'mselle," the outlaw went on with his leering grin. "Talapus will protect you—and see that you do not try to escape!"

Then he turned away, to pick up his rifle, Klunok doing likewise. The two men went out, but at the doorway Gautier lingered for a moment.

"Be warned, ma'mselle," he told her. "Do not try to run away, for the wolf will be waiting outside. He knows you for a stranger, and therefore an enemy." Gautier smiled again and was gone.

Alone, Sheila sat there motionless for a time. Then she got up, went to the door, which she opened cautiously, and peered out. Gautier had spoken the truth! Just outside sat the waiting wolf, as if hoping that she would try to escape.

In some manner, Klunok had made it apparent to the wolf that the latter must remain behind, to guard the girl. Probably the wolf considered her fair prey, providing that he could get at her. Through contact with man, the wolf had lost all natural fear of human beings and there was no question but that Talapus would attack the girl if given the opportunity.

Hastily, she slammed the flimsy door

shut and sank down on her knees, as though overcome with the hopelessness of her predicament.

But after a time she arose again and went back to the couch. For several minutes she lay there thinking, trying to plan some method by which she could escape.

Her thoughts, too, were of Tom Ballard and her brother, Jim. Gautier had declared they were dead—yet the warning which the wolf had brought, indicated otherwise. Even then, however, Gautier and Klunok probably would ambush them. Good woodsmen though Tom and Jim were, they were as novices when compared to the two outlaws. Gautier would make certain of Ballard's death this time, if it were possible.

PRESENTLY Sheila was roused from her gloomy thoughts by a scratching sound at the door. Talapus! The wolf was trying to get inside.

Sudden fear swept the girl; the door was a flimsy thing at best, even as was the rest of the cabin. The savage, hungry beast outside, evidently became impatient over the fact that she did not attempt to escape, and likewise emboldened by the realization that the girl was afraid of him, was trying to force an entrance.

Horrified, Sheila saw the loosely-barred door sag slightly as Talapus worked at it with his jaws, and she heard the splintering of wood as he sought to wrench loose the frame-work of the panel.

She rushed at the door, shouting to frighten the wolf. For a moment he paused; then, apparently understanding what she was trying to do, he began working at the door once more. With his strong jaws he would tear off splinters and each time he did so, bracing his feet against the door, it seemed that the frail contrivance would crash inward.

Fearfully, Sheila looked about the place for a weapon of some kind; but there was nothing, save a stick of wood in front of the fireplace. This would be a puny cudgel at best, to fight off the attack of the savage brute in case it did break down the door, which he would surely do unless Gautier or Klunok arrived soon. She

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screamed their names, but heard no sound in reply save the steady grinding of the wolf's jaws on the door-frame.

Sheila had believed that she had already prepared herself to meet death—yet death in the form which confronted her now, awoke a new desire to live. She could not bear to contemplate the dread moment when the half-famished beast would break inside, overpower her. Again and again she called the names of Gautier and Klunok. She found herself calling on Tom Ballard, but knew that it was a waste of breath. There was nobody to hear, nobody to help her.

Within a few minutes at best, the persistence of the grim, gray slayer would be rewarded. The door would give way; Talapus would leap inside, and mete out a death as swift as it would be horrible. Sheila fought with an almost overwhelming desire to swoon; but she realized that she must not, that she needed every faculty alert and ready for the moment when the wolf broke into the cabin.

That steady splintering of the door, that grim gnawing, suggestive of powerful jaws and fangs, continued. The methodical silence of the beast was what made the situation doubly terrifying. Wolf-like, Talapus would make his kill in silence, even as he forebore now to growl and rage at the obstructing door, as a dog would have done.

The shaggy beast concentrated wholly upon getting through the panel within the shortest possible space of time, as though he realized the need for haste, that he must do his work before either of the men returned.

Anxiously, the girl looked around the room, hopeful of discovering some way to forestall the beast. She might, by dint of much effort, loosen one of the logs, and get outside, her hope being to reach a tree which she could climb and remain there until Klunok or Gautier returned. But it would be a highly hazardous feat to attempt. Talapus would hear her and would head her off before she could gain a tree.

The only thing to do was to remain in the cabin and, failing to find some way of successfully battling the wolf, pray that help would come.

SUDDENLY, she saw a ray of hope. The log walls were rough and uneven enough for her to climb. The roof was low, but she believed that she could scale the wall until she could reach the rafter. There she would cling and, while she would not be out of the way of the wolf, who could leap up at her, she might at least fight him off by means of the club. It would be better than attempting to battle him on the floor. Grasping the stick, she bravely attemped the climb.

It would have been difficult even though she did not have a sprained ankle, but now it was almost an impossibility. Yet fear gave her strength, drove her to new effort.

Painfully slow, yet determinedly, she worked her way upward, gripping the unbarked logs and stifling a scream of agony as she put weight on her injured foot. Now she clung almost in the peak of the roof, her feet resting on a log in the wall, while her left hand stayed her by holding fast to the rafter. With her right hand, she gripped the club.

How long she could maintain this perilous position, there was no way of telling, save that it could not be more than comparatively brief. Had she been a less courageous girl than she was, she would have fainted long ago; but Tom Ballard himself, who won his battles by stronghearted determination, would have gloried in her resolve at this moment. Breathlessly she clung there, waiting.

Nor did she have to wait long. There was a splintering crash from the door as the frame-work sagged and fell outward. Then she glimpsed the long nose, the pointed ears, the cruel face of the killer wolf.

Only for an instant he surveyed her. Then, with a lurch of his body, he shoved aside the remains of the door and stepped inside. She saw him crouch, almost beneath her; saw his muscles tense for the leap. Her lips moving swiftly in prayer, the girl gripped her club more tightly and set herself.

Suddenly she saw him coming, launched like a gray thunderbolt, ears laid back and

jaws half-opened, exposing his white fangs. She swung wildly with the club.

But the movement dislodged her. She felt her hand slipping. Then she was falling. Yet as she dropped, she put her last strength into a single, tremendous blow. Whether it landed or not, she could not know, for the oblivion against which she had fought so long, came with merciful swiftness.

XXI

IN that downward plunge in the darkness, Tom Ballard felt that death had overtaken him at last. So suddenly and unexpectedly had it happened that he was given no time to prepare himself. In the fractional part of a second when he was dropping, it seemed that he lived an eternity. The wind whistled about his ears; something smote him a stunning blow; there was a succession of shocks . . . and then dazed, although still conscious, he was aware that he was at the bottom.

Looking upward, he saw that the face of the cliff was not so steep as it had appeared from above. All about him were countless thousands of little spruce trees and these, growing so closely together that a man could scarcely force his way through them, had broken his fall.

The river was just below him now, he surmised, for the steady murmur of it came clearly to him. The direction he must take, therefore, was to the right.

He struck off, while above him the smoke-clouds from the forest-fire rolled impotently across the valley.

Although the smoke-clouds overcast the sky, the sun was now up, a red ball of fire whose weak rays lightened the gloom. Still going upstream, as Trayner had told him, Ballard kept on; and at last he saw looming before him the painted cliffs where he had found the rich gold deposit and where Gautier had tried to kill him.

Ballard paused, then, for he knew that Klunok's cabin was not much farther, unless Trayner had lied.

He decided to take the bold risk of crossing the river, to gain the heights on the opposite side, from which point the

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cabin must surely be visible. A convenient log-jam gave him footing over the swiftest part of the stream; and thereafter he plunged boldly into the current.

He had gained the foot of a great slide on the opposite bank and was just starting up, when he felt the wind of a bullet and, on the heels of it, a snapping report of a rifle. At the same instant he saw the head and shoulders of Gautier above him.

Throwing up his gun, he fired instinctively; there was no time to aim. But at the shot, he saw Gautier vanish. Still with gun ready, Ballard swiftly climbed a few feet, then paused to fire again, for Gautier had reappeared.

Again he did this, but the next time, Gautier was too quick for him. The outlaw fired and Ballard knew that he had been hit. Yet it was but a slight flesh wound, although the bullet had come dangerously close to tearing through his chest. As it was, the missile had merely flicked through his shirt, under his left arm-pit.

He fired once more and quickly Gautier replied, his bullet striking low and filling Ballard's eyes with sand. Again Ballard shot, then climbed a few feet and took refuge behind a rock while he jammed more cartridges into the gun.

A more prudent man might have halted then and there to shoot it out with Gautier. But Ballard had thrown caution to the winds. One determination gripped him—that he would carry Gautier's position by direct assault or die in the attempt. Gun reloaded, he poked the barrel around the rock and half-lifted himself, watchful for Gautier's appearance. As Ballard did so, there came from the left, another shot and his arm went numb. Klunok!

From two points their fire was converging upon him. Ballard returned that shot, although his left arm felt as stiff and unwieldly as though it was made of lead. Whether he made a hit he could not tell. He had time only to slew his gun around again, and fire a second time, to avoid being murdered by Gautier.

But Ballard had gained another twenty feet and, although he was wounded, only death itself could have stopped him now. Indeed, he felt that grimly his will would carry him on to the top even though his brain no longer controlled his body. Not far now—and he shot once more.

But Gautier had fired at the same time and the bullet, ricocheting from the rock beside Ballard, half-blinded him with particles of grit. Moreover, it drove the last vestige of reason from him, so that he fired and fired, until the click of the firing-pin told him the gun was empty. All the while he climbed, hugging the rocks as well as he could, yet ever firing. And his last shot seemed to have a peculiar effect.

GRAVEL was sliding swiftly toward him. A landslide! Wounded, maddened though he was, he had yet sense enough to roll aside, to avoid being under the boulder which he felt was coming, and which had doubtless been dislodged by Gautier. What he did was instinctive, for his brain seemed incapable of reason at that moment. But through the fog of bewilderment, it seemed that he heard a cry. He focused his attention, with an effort above him.

What he saw was indeed a landslide coming, but with a dust-covered object in the van, an object which moved—waved arms—and cried out!

Gautier! Either through accident or his eagerness to get a better shot at Ballard, the outlaw had leaned too far over the cliff. Loose earth had broken away and before he could draw back he was falling. Moreover, he was wounded, for not all of Ballard's shots had gone wild.

Even while the situation impinged upon Ballard's dazed consciousness, the thing happened. Gathering momentum, as it gathered fresh earth, the slide rolled downward. In a flash Gautier, still screaming, was gone; while a mass of loose rock and gravel thundered upon him and continued to pile up at the bottom. The cliff-side where Ballard clung, trembled in sympathy, as though a fresh slide would start. But the rock behind which he lay, was deeply imbedded in the soil and remained fast.

Gautier was gone! Dead—buried under tons of rock and earth. But there

was still the crazed Indian with whom Ballard must reckon. As the dust-cloud rose up from the bottom, Ballard started upward again.

He gained the summit at last, more dead than alive, and paused there while his dazed brain tried to grasp that which his eyes saw.

To the right, not more than three hundred yards distant, was a cabin, which must be Klunok's. But to the left, at the rim of the canyon, Ballard saw something else.

It was the shaggy figure of Klunok, bent low, and scuttling from rock to rock, pausing only to fire at some enemy behind.

From where he lay, Ballard could see that enemy, or rather, many of them.

Men in red coats—the Mounties! Other men, dressed in the rough but serviceable clothes of northern trappers and woodsmen.

It seemed that Ballard could see Tomlinson, although he could not be sure. Yet he understood what had happened, what was happening now.

Coming up the unburned side of the river, the Mounties had surprised Klunok. Perhaps Gautier had seen them, too, and his desire to be revenged upon Ballard, had driven him to take a losing chance. In any event, they were pressing the crazed Indian.

Once more Klunok turned to fire at them; then boldly ran. But ere he had taken a dozen steps, he saw Ballard, saw the latter's rifle swing. . . . What Klunok did then stuck fast in Ballard's recollection for years afterward. For the Indian stopped, as though undecided; looked back at the Mounties pursuing him, then at Ballard, whose lips were already framing the command to surrender. Then, with an animal-like cry, he flung his arms wide, raced toward the brink of the cliff, and leaped—into space!

Ballard lowered his gun. He could not see what happened below, nor would he have trusted himself to look. Instead, he straightened up, and, weaving on his feet, started for Klunok's cabin.

For Ballard had heard something which set his nerves tingling. Sheila's voice—raised in a cry for help!

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XXII

HOW he ever covered that distance so rapidly, wounded as he was, Ballard could never understand. But he found himself at the door of the cabin, heard his own voice, as though from afar, calling the girl's name.

And he heard her reply.

"The wolf!"

But ere he could leap inside, he saw framed in the opening the shaggy form of the gray killer. For an instant beast and man regarded each other. In that fleeting moment Ballard saw that the beast's head was bloody, that it was hurt. Sheila's blow had been a lucky one and the wolf had been partially stunned.

Yet now at sight of the man, whom Talapus knew for an enemy, the beast seemed to revive with astonishing quickness. Silently, it sprang for the throat-hold.

Ballard swung the gun as he would have swung a bludgeon, a powerful, sidewise blow.

It caught the wolf on the side of its head; yet the animal had struck so abruptly that its jaws were within a few inches of Ballard's throat when the blow landed. Had the wolf caught the full force of the swinging gun-muzzle, the beast would have been brained. As it was, the gray killer merely fell, stunned.

Ballard would have struck again, but found that the first blow had broken the gun across the thin plates covering the mechanism. Hurling the useless weapon aside, he fell upon the dazed wolf with bare hands, just as the killer weaved to its feet. Writhing in Ballard's grip, it slashed the man's forearm to the bone, so that the blood instantly reddened his hand.

But Ballard did not relax his hold. Bowing his head to protect his eyes from the slashing strokes of the beast's feet, the man all but buried his face in the wolf's fur, while he continued to hang on and tighten his grip relentlessly.

Now he knew that the end could not be far away, for the agonies of the wolf told him that it was dying. Nevertheless, he was near exhaustion himself. Before his eyes seemed to swim a raw, red mist; while in his brain there kept hammering the thought that he *must* hang on—*must* hang on—

With a last dying effort, the wolf again threw the man off-balance and the two of them rolled upon the ground.

The red mist swam more rapidly before his eyes. Indeed, it seemed to have resolved itself into a swift-flowing stream. It seemed that he was drowning, that his only hope of safety lay in keeping his grip fast on something—what it was he could not tell at that moment—yet something which meant life or death to him. He *must* hang on—*must* hang on—

THEN the dream changed and he found himself half-sitting up, with Sheila's arms about his neck, while she was covering his face with kisses and calling him endearing names. But through this pleasantness shot remembrance of the wolf and he would have fought his way blindly to his feet, had not other arms—stronger ones—held him fast. He opened his eyes.

He saw that he was still outside the cabin, where he had fought the wolf. But now Sheila was with him. And here, too, were the Mounties, the trappers. Tomlinson. Jim Morrison. All were looking at him, half-wonderingly.

"Tom," said the fur company man feelingly, "are you sure that you're alive? You look, well—as though you might have been murdered seven times over!"

Well, Klunok was dead. And so was Gautier. Here was Sheila, miraculously restored to him once more. Involuntarily, his arms went around her, for he felt dizziness coming upon him again. As from afar, he heard Jim Morrison's voice.

"Trayner died right after you left. I saw the fire coming, struck for the river and got across. Just before daylight, I met the Mounties. We heard the firing and came up as quickly as we could."

But Ballard had no ears for explanations. In fact, it seemed that he was unaware of all, except Sheila.

"Next spring," he told her, as though the others could not hear, "we'll come back here and spend our honeymoon; and get the gold. Just the two of us, Sheila."

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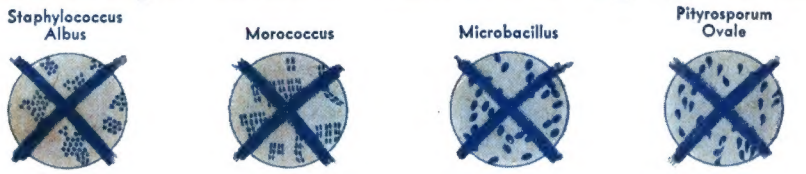

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